



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
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Dear Chancellor,

Like people across the country, Ealing's residents are facing a triple hit in their wallets this spring: of rising living costs, rising taxes, and reduced benefits. With a local economy that is particularly dependent on sectors that continue to be hit hard by the pandemic, such as aviation and associated businesses, this squeeze will be felt acutely by many of our borough's residents.

The impact will also be most concentrated on the poorest and those in precarious employment, ensuring that the structural inequalities that the pandemic has thrown such a harsh light on, will be further exacerbated unless urgent action is taken by your government.

I'm therefore writing to ask that the government take a number of crucial steps in order to help Ealing's residents through these difficult months.

Urgent help with energy bills

Soaring wholesale energy costs and a broken energy market mean that in April nearly every resident of Ealing will be hit with large and intensely painful hikes in their energy bills. The pain will be compounded by this coming alongside the introduction of your National Insurance hike, and inflation that the Bank of England predicts will hit 5% in the spring. You have the ability to make a real difference to the finances of stretched households. Both oil and gas producers, and the Treasury, have reaped a windfall from the hikes in wholesale fuel prices. It's time for some of that to come back to hard-pressed households in Ealing and elsewhere. A windfall tax on the profits of oil and gas producers could fund a cut of an average of £200 on household bills. Similarly, a cut in the VAT rate on energy bills to 0%, paid for through the additional receipts that the Treasury has already obtained from higher bills, would provide significant help to many households.

Reverse the Universal Credit cut

The £20 uplift to Universal Credit was introduced to help with the increased costs that those in poverty faced from the pandemic. With costs of food, energy and other essentials still soaring, the justification for the removal of the uplift is increasingly





threadbare. For many households in low wage or precarious work, or who are unemployed, this uplift helped to ensure they didn't have to choose between heating and eating. That little extra assistance is now gone, hitting the living standards of the poorest hardest. I would urge you to reverse this mean-spirited gesture, in recognition of the hugely increased living costs that households are facing at this time.

Guarantee free school meals this year

With food price inflation running so high, it has never been more important that food poverty during school holidays is tackled. The government needs to be clear that it will cover the full costs of providing holiday-time meals for children eligible for FSM throughout all school holidays in 2022. Costs of meals don't magically disappear for hard-pressed households just because children aren't at school.

Help to keep transport fares low

TfL is still waiting for a serious, sustainable long-term funding settlement from the government. With passenger numbers currently at barely 50% of what they would normally be, TfL continues to take a very substantial financial hit from the pandemic. London remains the only major western city that is expected to operate its transport network without ongoing financial support from central government. A failure to provide a realistic financial settlement for TfL in the very near future will be likely to mean that significant fare increases are needed in order to keep vital transport services running. With those on lower incomes generally less able to work from home, fare hikes would hit those least able to afford them hardest, compounding the cost of living crisis. TfL's is also a major employer in Ealing, both directly and through its suppliers, and cuts to its spending power will have a real impact on jobs locally, as well as across the country.

As a council, we will continue to do everything we can to help our residents through this squeeze on household budgets, but there is much that is outside our power. What I have set out above would represent an important package to reduce some of the pressures Ealing's residents face, and will continue to face as National Insurance, food prices, energy bills and travel costs continue to rise.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Peter Mason
Leader of the Council

Cllr Bassam Mahfouz
Cabinet Member for Decent Living Incomes