



TUSC's core policy platform for the May 2023 local elections

Vote for a socialist response to the cost-of-living crisis!

The poverty and suffering threatened by the cost-of-living crisis is not inevitable. Alongside industrial struggle, local government has the potential to be part of the working-class fightback against the Tories and the bosses trying to make us pay for the crisis and the chaos.

The 2023 council elections provide an opportunity to challenge those candidates from the establishment parties who claim there is nothing that can be done in the face of the historic erosion of our living standards. Councils in fact retain both significant powers and resources that can be used to make an immediate difference to peoples' lives, as well as the ability to lead a campaign for central-government funding.

Local councils still own municipal buildings that could be opened up to run community services in warm spaces such as youth clubs, social spaces for older people, crèches, and so on. They could introduce free school breakfasts now – and not stop there, as whole families are going hungry. School kitchens could provide breakfast, lunch and an evening meal, and councils could link up with food banks to fund and democratically organise food distribution. Councils could begin now a mass programme of home insulation to reduce energy costs. And they have powers to award grants to those unable to pay sky-high bills.

Inflation is certainly hitting local government finances but councils still have borrowing powers and reserves which can be mobilised for an emergency programme of measures to stop inflation austerity leading to poverty, cold and homelessness – if the will to fight the government was there.

And bold measures by councils would give enormous confidence to workers, many already fighting back in the workplace, to participate in a mass campaign for government funding if councils organised it.

Most current councillors however, including unfortunately the majority of Labour's 6,000 or so local representatives, would say they cannot use their legal authority to act without first getting funding guarantees from the government. They will say that the impact of inflation and the new round of austerity leave them with no choice but to cut. But they do have a choice.

Although the Tories have made deep cuts to councils since 2010 they still account for over one-fifth of all spending on public services, and retain responsibilities for adult social care, housing, education support, transport, recycling and rubbish collection, libraries and many other services. That's a powerful position from which to organise a fightback. Councils should first spend what's needed – and then organise a campaign to demand the money back from the government if there is any shortfall in meeting the bills.

The U-turns made by the Tory governments under Johnson, Truss and Sunak, spending billions when the pressure is on them, show that if just a handful of councils used the powers they have to refuse to implement any more cuts and spend what is necessary instead, the Tories could be forced to pay up.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an inclusive umbrella, not an exclusive one, with its banner available to be used on the ballot paper by every working-class fighter prepared to stand up to the capitalist establishment politicians at election time. Every trade unionist, anti-cuts campaigner, community and campus activist and socialists from any party or none who want to see an alternative to austerity politicians can become a TUSC candidate. But as a minimum commitment voters should know that any councillor elected under the TUSC banner will:

- **Oppose all cuts and closures to council services, jobs, pay and conditions. We reject the claim that ‘some cuts’ are necessary to our services or that the Covid crisis and inflation austerity are a reason for attacks on working class people’s living standards.**
- **Support all workers’ struggles against government policies making ordinary people pay for the crisis, and for inflation-proof pay rises – no to fire and rehire.**
- **Fight for united working-class struggle against racism, sexism and all forms of oppression.**
- **Use councils’ powers to begin a mass building programme of eco-friendly affordable council homes to tackle the housing crisis.**
- **Oppose fracking and fight for local Climate Emergency plans, based on genuine democratic debate, that create new employment, reduce emissions and improve air quality and the local environment, while protecting the jobs, pay and conditions of all workers.**
- **Reject council tax, rent and service charge increases for working-class people to make up for cuts in central funding, support a redistributive revenue-raising system to finance local council services, and demand central government restores the cuts in funding it has imposed.**
- **Vote against the privatisation of council jobs and services, or the transfer of existing council services to social enterprises or ‘arms-length’ management organisations which are the first steps to their privatisation.**
- **Use all the legal powers available to councils to oppose both the cuts and government policies which centrally impose the transfer of public services to private bodies. This includes using whatever powers councils retain to refer local NHS decisions, and to initiate referenda and organise public commissions and consultations in campaigns to defend public services.**
- **Refuse to co-operate with commissioners sent by central government to attempt to impose cuts on local services.**
- **Vote for councils to refuse to implement austerity. TUSC councillors will support councils which in the first instance use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid making cuts. But we argue that the best way to mobilise the mass campaign that is necessary to defend and improve council services is to set a budget that meets the needs of the local community and demand that government funding makes up the shortfall.**

Upon election TUSC councillors would at the first opportunity put forward for a vote in the council chamber the following immediate emergency measures for the council to take against cost-of-living suffering:

NO ONE TO BE COLD

Top up the Tory's miserly Household Support Fund to provide grants for those unable to pay their bills; an emergency programme of home insulation; extend the opening of public buildings, including libraries, to provide staffed warm spaces and youth facilities.

NO ONE TO BE HUNGRY

Fund kitchens in schools and other services to introduce free breakfasts, lunches and evening meals; expand food banks and distribution of safe food 'waste' under democratic council control; fund public provision of high quality free care, including childcare, to prevent care cost-related hunger.

NO ONE TO BE HOMELESS

Use council licencing powers to cap rents, including for students, and ban evictions of those who fall into cost-of-living-related arrears; use compulsory-purchase orders to take over empty homes to house working-class families and young people in housing need; for an emergency shared-ownership programme to support struggling mortgage-holders; expand specialist domestic violence refuges and services.