

# Council is accused of 'wasting a fortune' on taxis, tea and biscuits

## Taxpayer's Alliance hits out over spending

by Alisha Rouse  
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The cash-strapped town hall forked out more than £850,000 for taxis last year, and more than £133,000 for drinks and nibbles for meetings since 2010.

As the hard-up council announced it must save £26m this year, the staggering spend emerged – equivalent to more than seven million tea bags and 429,000 packs of digestive biscuits – despite council leader Richard Watts claiming the “fat” had been “trimmed” off spending.

The whopping refreshment spend was revealed after a Freedom of Information request from the *Gazette*, and the figures show more than £859,000 was spent on taxis – an average of more than £70,000 a month since 2012.

The figure is more than five times higher than neighbouring Hackney's bill of £163,000, but far less than Camden's £1.8m spend.

Meanwhile in just eight months last year, an eye-watering £20,641 was spent on drinks and nibbles, with £28,662 spent in 2012, and £55,000 in 2011.

Cllr Andy Hull, Islington Council's executive member for finance, said the majority of the spend on taxis was on taking adults and children to special schools and day centres and only used by staff in rare situations, while a council officer said the £133,000 spent on refreshments and biscuits included the cost of functions such as the annual Christmas dinner for pensioners and events to encourage foster carers.

“These figures show we are cutting the cash spent on refreshments every year, spending half as much as we did three years ago. Last year, the council spent less than 20p per week on refreshments for each member of staff. Nonetheless, I am reminding colleagues to redouble their efforts to minimise such costs.”

### Struggle

The food and drinks bill has been slammed by the TaxPayers' Alliance, who said that “residents expect their council tax to be spent on front-line services, not first-rate dining.”

Robert Oxley, campaign director, said: “This is an absolute fortune on council snacks at a time when many households struggle even to put food on the table. Council chiefs need to slash the biscuit bill and end any unjustified provisions of free food.”



■ How much Islington and its neighbours spend on taxi fares

Islington Liberal Democrat leader Terry Stacy said he was “gobsmacked.”

He continued: “Labour councillors obviously think they can do what they want and hope nobody notices. Either that or they are failing to keep a proper eye on spending. When residents are facing the squeeze, how can they justify this? It seems they can find money for the things they want.”

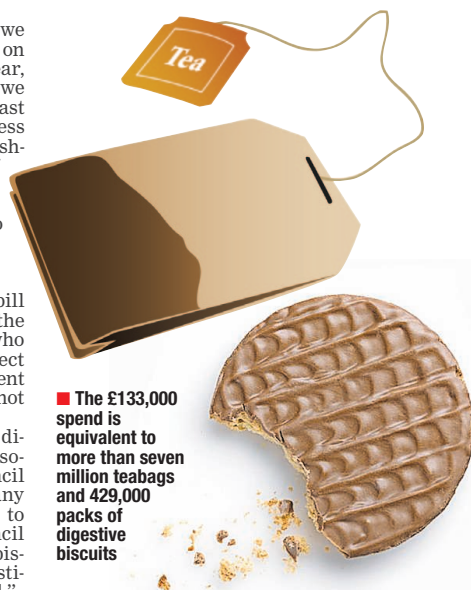
Councils are coming under increasing pressure to

slash spending on refreshments – Edinburgh council was in hot water for its spend last year, which was 80 per cent less than in Islington.

A council in Wales has even put a ban on free biscuits and buffets for councillors after its £28,000 three-year bill came under fire.

The news comes as the Town Hall are forced to save £112m between 2011 and 2015.

■ See page four for more on the budget announcement.



■ The £133,000 spend is equivalent to more than seven million teabags and 429,000 packs of digestive biscuits



■ Hashim Sharif with his new daughter, who was born at 4.46am on New Year's Day



■ Saira and Abdul Samad with daughter Jannah  
Pictures: Polly Hancock

## 'New Year will always be special to us now'

New Year will have been an anti-climax for many across Islington – but parents at the Whittington Hospital's maternity ward created a memory they will never forget.

Midwives at the hospital, in Magdala Avenue, Archway, delivered 10 babies on New Years Day – more than three times the number delivered on January 1 last year.

Hashim Shariff and his wife Hana welcomed a girl into the world at 4.46am.

The couple are yet to name the 7lb bundle of joy, who joins their 16-month-old son at their home in Basire Street, Highbury.

A very tired Mr Shariff, 23, said: “We're very happy. I love my new daughter very much and she has settled down now and taken to breast feeding.”

“We're currently trying to decide between two names for her.”

The first baby to be born at the Whittington in 2014 was little Jannah Samad, 5.5lb, who was brought in to the ward at 12.10am.

Her parents Saira and Abdul were over the moon with their third daughter and said Jannah's sisters Namira, six, and Mya, two, were excited about having a new member of the family

to play with.

Mrs Samad said: “She's very calm and is sleeping lots, not like my second daughter who was crying all the time.”

“Everything went really well and to plan and the hospital was brilliant. I've had all of my girls here and the nurses are very experienced and lovely.”

“New Year will always be very special to us now.”

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