

The
Green
Alternative Budget

for

Brighton & Hove
City Council

2011/12

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on Brighton & Hove City Council



Green Party

Fair is worth fighting for
brightonhovegreens.org

“This Green Alternative budget is a practical example of how the Green Party's commitment for social justice and environmental protection would challenge the Conservative Administration's savage spending cuts, and move us closer to the greener, fairer society we urgently need.”

Caroline Lucas MP, Leader of the Green Party

Foreword

The massive and damaging spending cuts imposed on Brighton and Hove City Council by the Conservative and LibDem Coalition Government will perpetuate inequality in the city, victimise the vulnerable and penalise the poor.

We believe the cuts go beyond necessity and are fuelled by dogma, and in this alternative budget Green councillors have limited the damage as far as we can in difficult circumstances to do our best for the city.



Our priorities are to protect funding services critical to the welfare of the city's most vulnerable people and to save jobs. We have restored some services and put money aside to protect services during the year because we don't believe the efficiency savings promised by the council's Conservative administration in their budget can be made without causing further cuts and more hardship.

Fairness is at the heart of this budget. We have restored the 1 per cent cut in council tax proposed by the Conservatives, for instance, because we think the £1.1 million it yields will be used more effectively and fairly to protect services and jobs for the general good of the city as opposed to giving each household a very small reduction in what they pay. It is also a budget that looks to the future by investing in young people and infrastructure to make Brighton and Hove a healthy, low carbon city, and the small increase in the voluntary sector budget is a recognition of the contribution made by voluntary organisations.

We have listened to community and voluntary organisations, trade unions and the business sector in drawing up this budget. We know that another £35 million in cuts is promised for the next two years, and we believe that we all need to be talking now about how we are going to deal with them.

The lack of information supplied by the city's Conservative administration and the lateness of Government decisions on spending has made producing this budget very difficult. While the Conservatives walk alone, we believe we should all be involved in the task of saving of our city from the excesses of the Coalition's cuts.

Bill Randall

Cllr Bill Randall, Convenor of the Green Group of Councillors

Introduction

Cutting local government budgets is an ill-considered policy which will harm the most vulnerable. It runs contrary to the views of the Green Party, many leading economists, fairness and common sense. Cutting spending while the economy is fragile risks a further downturn and reduces services for those most likely to need them. The national deficit does not justify the cuts Conservative local government minister Eric Pickles is gleefully imposing on us all. This deficit is by no means the largest it has been in modern times, it is not an emergency.



In the course of an economic cycle, a government shouldn't spend more than it has, and should leave some aside in case of troubled times. The previous Labour government's failure to properly regulate the financial sector and rein in military spending left the UK more vulnerable to economic turmoil than it otherwise could have been.

Greens, including Caroline Lucas MP, will continue to make the case that the national approach to cuts is not the right one. But locally, elected councillors have a legal duty to set a balanced budget. The alternative would be to have un-elected council officers making the decisions on spending for our city's services.

This leaves us the incredibly difficult task of minimising the harm caused by these budget reductions imposed by the Conservative and LibDem government. Council resources are far more limited than some commentators would have us believe. Their budgets are being centrally reduced whilst being given no new powers to raise funds.

This alternative budget sets out how a Green-led council would have addressed the challenges this city faces differently. It was produced in the very limited time the Conservative council administration allowed opposition parties to review the budget papers ahead of the vote. Information about this budget has been deliberately withheld to the very last minute. In forming this budget we have battled a culture of secrecy to understand the detailed financial plans for council services in the coming years.

However, whilst not perfect, it is my view that the proposals here reverse the worst of the Conservative proposals, reduce the harm to the young, older people and the vulnerable whilst also leaving the finances in reasonable shape to face the further budget cuts we know the ministers in Whitehall will impose over the coming years. In a sense, it is the best that could be made of a bad job.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Kitcat". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Cllr Jason Kitcat, Finance spokesperson for the Green Group of Councillors

The Green Alternative Budget in Numbers

£500,000

New fund created for a renewable energy scheme to raise the council money from the Feed in Tariffs earned on solar or wind generation.

£450,000

New reserve created to deal with the risks of major restructures to services for Adult Social Care and Children, Young People & Families.

£924,000

Recurring funding put back into services for Children, Young People & Families.

£15,000 **£40,000**

More in grants to voluntary organisations in the city.

To pilot a residential food waste collection scheme.

£25,000 **£26,000**

To fund extra noise patrol shifts.

Saved by removing catering from meetings councillors attend.

The Green Alternative Budget explained

This budget delivers positive proposals, saves key services and reverses the most irresponsible of the Conservative administration's spending decisions. It puts £1.95 million more recurring funding into frontline services than the Conservative administration's budget while setting the scene for future positive, green ways to generate the council revenue.

Tax Freeze and Fiscal Sense

We propose to reverse the 1% council tax reduction, the 5% parking permit reduction and the removal of the Grand Avenue/The Drive cycle lanes. This leaves council tax frozen at least year's rate and residential parking permits 2% up from last year, which is the usual annual change. Freezing council tax releases a central government grant worth the same as a 2.5% tax increase for at least this year and the next. A tax increase of over 2.5% would be needed to make it worthwhile, yet the national government has said no council may raise tax beyond 3.5%. Given these limits and the tough economic circumstances for the city's residents, we support a tax freeze this year.

Reversing these two changes, plus the £1.1m cost of the cycle lane removal, release significant funds for the Green budget to stop many service reductions either completely or partially including to Child Psychologists, Fostering & Adoption, the School Music Service, the Youth Offending Service and a number of other schools services.

Removing high-paid officers, funding Connexions & the Living Wage

We propose eliminating the highly paid 'strategic director' roles and using the savings these would release to put £200,000 of recurring funding back into the Connexions careers and advisory service, prioritising Special Educational Needs (SEN) support in mainstream schools with that funding. In future years we would also seek to use some of the savings from removing these highly paid officer posts into providing a living wage to all the council's staff. The National Minimum Wage is not enough for people to live a modest life on in our city. Some council staff do get paid less than the cost of living, which is why we would seek to bring their pay up to a 'living wage' in the coming years.

Green thinking: Food waste collections & renewable energy generation

As 35% of residential waste is food, we propose spending a one-off £40,000 on a food waste collection pilot. If successful it could deliver significant savings by removing food from going to landfill and incineration. We also propose a £500,000 fund to kick-start investment in solar panels for council homes and offices, which would create free electricity for tenants and new revenue through the 'Feed in Tariff' for renewable energy

generation. We also budget for increasing the number of noise patrol shifts, as noise nuisance continues to be a major issue in the city.

Other key areas saved by the Green budget are day services for Adult Social Care, cuts to the Communities & Equalities team, reduced staffing in Development Control (Planning), a restructure of the Community Safety, Drugs & Alcohol team as well as reductions in the Public Protection & Environmental Health teams.

Some of these would be funded by reducing grass verge mowing costs by £100,000; removing catering for meetings councillors attend and revising the councillor allowance scheme to meet government guidance on the number of special allowances paid.

At first glance we were very concerned by the proposed one-off spending of £4.5million on car parks. If this was funded by general revenue, it would not be a priority for Greens. However, having sought clarification, it is now clear that these are self-funding proposals which will improve the appearance and safety of council-owned car parks. The cost of borrowing will be more than covered by car parks revenue, and so reversing the investment programme would require us to take money from other services to plug the revenue shortfall it would produce. So rather than take more money from frontline services, we propose leaving the programme to continue.

Housing for the city and preparing for uncertainty

Affordable homes are in short supply in Brighton & Hove. We desperately need more decent housing at reasonable prices. We continue to support the Local Delivery Vehicle (LDV) and reform of the national housing funding system to improve the city's housing situation. The LDV will borrow against the value of 500 council properties to release up to £45 million for their improvement, a scheme Greens have long championed.

Meanwhile the Conservative administration's budget proposal of a £200,000 New Homes Venture Fund would struggle to buy even one family home at current prices. It is insufficient to make a difference city-wide, and would be taken from valuable recurring funding which we believe can, at this point, be better spent on saving frontline services.

The Conservative administration's proposals depend on large amounts of reserves being spent in the coming financial year, leaving little for future years, when we know more cuts are coming to our central government grant. Thus we propose returning at least £245,000 back into reserves for future years. We also have created a new reserve of £450,000 due to the high level of risk and uncertainty relating to proposed changes in services for Adult Social Care and Children, Young People and Families.

The Green Alternative Budget Proposals in Full

It is recommended that these detailed tables are considered along with the budget papers from the Cabinet papers 17th Feb 2011 or the Council papers 3rd March 2011 from <http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk>

Table 1: Tory Proposals to be reversed by the alternative Green budget

Positive figures are spending proposals being reversed.

Negative figures are saving proposals (cuts) being reversed.

Tory proposal to be reversed	Recurring funding £'000	One-off funding £'000	Comments
1% Council Tax reduction	1198	0	Reversal of tax cut results in council tax freeze at last year's rate.
Reduced residents parking permits by 5%	158	0	Brings back to usual 2% annual increase.
New Homes bonus to Venture fund	200	0	Keep £0.1m administration proposals on LABGI spending.
Unallocated reserve	0	205	Return into the general reserves.
Remove Grand Avenue/The Drive cycle lane	0	1100	Keep the cycle lane in place.
Remove strategic leadership board	250	-100	Estimated yr1 saving then £650k/yr, capital contribution for redundancy costs.
Remove car club space charging	-14	0	Remove £200/space/yr charges for car clubs.
Music service reductions	-59	0	Partial reversal.
School Workforce & Governor Dev	-44	6	Complete reversal.
Citywide Attendance Strategy Support	-25	6	Complete reversal.
School Improvement Service	-70	17	Complete reversal.

Tory proposal to be reversed	Recurring funding £'000	One-off funding £'000	Comments
Fostering & Adoption Service	-135	0	Partial reversal.
Education Welfare Service inc Educational Psychologists	-300	58.7	Whole service saving £470k. Psychologists are priority for this reversal (capital estimate).
Youth Offending Service	-91	17	Complete reversal.
Connexions	-200	34	Part reduction in saving to ease transition to new structure. Prioritising SEN support in mainstream schools.
Day services	-100	0	Reverse reduction in hours at council run day service.
Communities & Equalities team	-232	0	Complete reversal.
No inflation to voluntary org grants	-15	0	Increase pool for grants to voluntary organisations in the city.
Sustainable Transport	-47	3	Partial reduction in staff cuts in this dept (estimated capital).
Cut Development Control staffing	-227		Reverse savings relating to staff cuts.
Combined Public Protection staff cuts	-19	-40	Small revenue supplement + Capital to smooth staff loss & give chance for revenue such as pest control.
Restructure of Community Safety, Drugs, Alcohol	-347		Complete reversal.
Maintain schools Equality & Anti-bullying coordinator		-30	One-off funding for this year. Seek new funding source next year.

Note: As some service reductions couldn't deliver savings immediately in the 11/12 financial year, the Conservative budget used reserves to smooth this over. In reversing some of these savings, e.g. Connexions, reserves are released to be used elsewhere, hence positive figures in the 'one-off' column against some proposals.

Table 2: Green proposals to be implemented by the alternative Green budget
 This table lays out the positive Green proposals to improve our city for the future.
Positive figures are savings or new revenue from a proposal.
Negative figures are new spending by a proposal.

Green proposal to be implemented	Recurring funding £'000	One-off funding £'000	Comments
Reduce grass verge mowing	100	0	Reverses increase in verge mowing budget moved a few years ago by the Conservatives.
Remove catering at member meetings	26	0	Eliminate catering provision at meetings councillors attend.
Adopt new members allowances scheme	18	0	As recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel, reduces the number of special allowances paid.
Food waste collection pilot	0	-40	Spend to save in future years by trialling collection & digesting/composting of food waste.
Increase Noise Patrols	-25	0	Noise nuisance is a key issue in the city. Would add a new shift to the patrol.
Create reserve for ASCH & CYF risks	0	-450	In case of issues with the major changes to the Adult Social Care & Children, Young People & Families services.
Reserve for Feed-in-Tariff work	0	-500	To kick-start a new source of revenue from renewable energy generation.
Rebuild reserves	0	246.7	Put spare one-off back into reserves to improve financial position for future years.

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