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# **GREEN PROPOSALS FOR THE BRIGHTON & HOVE BUDGET 2018-19**

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**A city fit for the future**

Published by the Green Group of Councillors

## **Budget amendments 2018: Our priorities, our principles**

### **Foreword**



### **Councillor Phélim Mac Cafferty, Convenor of the Green Group of Councillors**

Three events have rocked local government in the last year: the Grenfell fire warned us of the horror of deregulation. An entire Council - Northamptonshire County Council - has gone bankrupt and exposed the failure of cuts. The collapse of private sector giant Carillion reminded us that councils rely on outsourcing too heavily and at a huge risk to public services. At the heart of all three is standing proof that cuts, eight years after their introduction, mixed with the madness of the market have been a complete disaster.

Under the circumstances, a 'business as usual' approach to the budget is as harmful as pretending that Labour can 'get the basics right' when cuts have already strangled key services. This is a budget which hammers marginalised residents - with six figure cuts to adult mental health support, learning disability and dementia care and cuts to sexual health services. Labour have drawn up a political pact with the Conservatives to ensure their plans pass. The Greens are now the only group to have submitted amendments to improve this year's budget.

Greens have continued to try and reverse some of the worst elements of the budget. We have challenged the council leadership for pursuing cuts that have gone too far, too fast and for failing to act for the most vulnerable. We cannot rescue the budget, merely amend it, but our proposals push for bold alternatives that centre around fairness for our residents and our environment.

### **Introduction**

#### **Councillor Ollie Sykes, Green Finance lead**

Our city of Brighton and Hove is a genuinely special place, an extraordinary place. It's also a place with more than its fair share of deprivation and vulnerability. Brighton and Hove is also a high-impact city environmentally. These characteristics demand a budget from the city council that responds to this need and to this opportunity. Unfortunately the budget proposed by the Labour administration is rather half-hearted in its response to all these issues. It's a disappointing budget lacking in ambition and empathy.

Greens have worked hard to develop amendments that address a number of the gaps in Labour's plans, without taking funds away from essential services. Our amendments reverse some cuts to social care, reinstate warm homes grants for those with disabilities and install Wi-Fi in sheltered housing. They will bring some emergency accommodation provision back in house, saving the council money and providing a safer environment for homeless people. Our amendments will kick start a number of sustainability initiatives that have been languishing under Labour, including food waste collection, district heat development and looking at a local solar farm. We want to install more bike parking and use money currently used to subsidise free parking for Councillors to reduce the proposed cut to Home to School transport.

These are amendments that address homelessness, fuel poverty, sustainability, transport and social care. They are good for the city and good for the council. We hope they have your support.

## **A Green approach that works – Millions brought in to protect services last year**

Over the last three years, work from the Green Group of Councillors has brought millions of pounds back in to the Council's budget. This has been used to protect essential public services. The money saved by the council taxpayer proves that investing in services that prevent more complex problems is a smart approach.

Although we can only make amendments to the Labour administration's budget, Greens have led with our principles of fairness and support for those who need it. Our aim is to make suggestions that turn the focus of the Council towards the real value of the city's preventative work and towards 'spend to save' initiatives that will support the Council – and our residents – in the long term. This is a different approach to managing budgets but we must push to resist savage cuts in difficult circumstances. Our key priority areas are outlined below, with our proposals included at the end of this document.

- Through our focus on the value of the city's preventative services the City Council reversed damaging cuts to community safety, youth work and early help.
- Last autumn Greens identified £208k for community and voluntary sector services. [1]
- Further to our work to save money on the budget last year, the council was able to fund a budget to tackle anti- social behaviour which blights many of the city centre squares.
- Our aim to redistribute Council funding more fairly by revising fees to be more in line with costs for those who can afford to pay, e.g property developers, helped to reverse cuts in key housing posts. [2]
- Green concerns about loss of money through council outsourcing and private contracts means the Council now does more to manage contracts with third party suppliers – an approach that will recoup over £1m. [3]

With more cuts planned for the years ahead, Greens are committed to an approach that ploughs funds into helping our communities become more resilient in the face of challenges still to come.

## **Our priorities, our principles**

This is the Labour Council's budget and Greens are allowed only six amendments to change it. As in previous years, Greens have led with our principles of fairness and sustainability at the core. Instead of taking from one service to pay for another, Greens have focused on alternative approaches that bring in new funding for the city.

Our proposals address homelessness, early help for families, social care, fuel poverty, food waste, city greenhouse gas emissions, transport and the council's own financial resilience.

Our key priorities are outlined below and detailed amendments included at the end of this document.

### **1. Taking action on homelessness (p4)**

### **2. Warm Homes (p6)**

### **3. A cleaner, greener city (p8)**

### **4. A fairer budget (p9)**

### **5. Spend to save: the value of prevention (p10)**

### **Appendix A: Green Group amendments (p12)**

# 1. Taking action on homelessness

More must be done to tackle the housing crisis in our city. Waiting lists for social housing are upwards of 17,000 people and there is a dire shortage of council homes.[4] The Labour Council promised to end rough sleeping by 2020 – yet under their leadership, rough sleeping has almost doubled.[5]

The Greens have fought hard all year round to bring in extra support to address these issues. Greens have lowered the cost of rents in a new council housing scheme, doubled the budget the council has available to purchase properties lost under ‘Right-To-Buy’ and set up a new, council-run homeless night shelter. [6]

Green amendments in this year’s budget take action to prevent homelessness, provide adequate emergency accommodation, increase Council resources for housing and support for vulnerable people.

## Council-owned emergency accommodation

Each year, the Council spends almost £4.1m purchasing emergency accommodation from private landlords. As the cost of temporary accommodation has risen by 43% in the last five years, budgets will continue to be stretched.[8] There were 1,666 households in temporary accommodation as of 31st December last year, with 3% placed in costly bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation. [7]

Instead of handing public money to private providers, it would be cost-effective for the council to purchase its own emergency accommodation. Any purchased property would directly help to reduce rough sleeping while making sure money comes back to the city, not private landlords. Reports on a similar initiative from Shepway Council detailed that providing 12 units of temporary accommodation in-house would save £186k per year.[9]

Despite the benefits of early help and prevention, private companies are also not currently contracted to provide support services, but the Council could fund this from rental income. [10]

**“Mirroring the experience of families themselves, the increasing unavailability of affordable housing further limits the options for councils trying to find settled and temporary accommodation for those that need it.**

**“As a result councils are increasingly using the most expensive, least desirable forms of emergency temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfast (B&B) and nightly rated accommodation, and having to house families for longer periods of time.”**

**Local Government Association**

## Housing First

Greens have campaigned for the Council to boost resources for ‘Housing First,’ a model that has been proven to prevent long-term and repeatedly homeless people returning to a life on the streets. [11] The approach provides homeless people with the stability and base where they can then receive regular support.

Evidence shows this approach typically rehuses between eight and nine out of every ten long-term and recurrently homeless people—a higher success rate than for other services targeted at this group. [12]

**Assuming that someone using a Housing First service would otherwise be accommodated in high intensity supported housing...Housing First could deliver potential overall savings in public expenditure that could be in excess of £15,000 per person per annum.**

**University of York Centre for Housing Policy**

Greens initiated one of the first Housing First pilot schemes in the U.K. Now run by St Mungo's, the service helped ten people. Further investment would prevent more people from sleeping rough.[13]

## **Boosting resources**

To deliver on ambitious housing plans, the council needs greater staff capacity. Yet cuts in these teams have reduced the Council's ability to implement housing solutions swiftly. With demand rising, this is a false economy and Green amendments will boost these teams so that housing improvements can move forward.

## **Connecting residents**

Our amendments also support vulnerable residents to gain access to WiFi - a service not currently provided in council-run sheltered accommodation, despite an increasing number of services in revenues and benefits becoming 'online-only'.

## 2. Warm homes

Green amendments address the need for warm, decent and environmentally friendly homes that are fit for the future.

In Brighton and Hove an estimated 14,863 homes struggle to meet their energy costs, a figure higher than both the regional and national averages. [14&15] The effects of a cold home on health and wellbeing disproportionately impact upon those already vulnerable or in poverty – such as the elderly, or those living with a disability. Council grants that support people with the costs of energy efficiency have an uncertain future. Our amendments seek to adequately fund this work.

### Reliable, affordable energy

Our dependence on fossil fuels is causing global warming – but it’s not just the environment that suffers. Many are left at the mercy of private energy companies and fluctuating bills. Investment in renewable energy offers proven benefits to residents, financial returns for the council and puts the city on a more environmentally sustainable footing.

### The case for district heat networks

The Council began work on ‘District Heat’ networks under the Green administration. This is reliable, cheap, locally sourced, low-carbon energy. Analysis indicates that half of the UK’s existing heat demand could be met by heat networks – an approach that would save over £30bn. [16]

Nottingham City Council’s network supplies heating to almost 5,000 homes and 100 businesses, reducing the city’s carbon emissions by over 27,000 tonnes annually. [17]

Plans are in place to develop heat networks in parts of the city where residents are highly likely to be fuel poor. Fourteen sites have been identified for feasibility studies but have not been sufficiently funded.

Greens want to give this vital development the cash injection it requires to alleviate fuel poverty for some of our poorest residents while simultaneously helping our city generate energy in a way that won’t harm our environment.

**“There is a compelling case for more aggressively tackling fuel poverty and doing so through a more comprehensive approach to thermal efficiency – not just because of the misery and suffering caused by fuel poverty, but also so we can meet our climate change obligations.” [18]**

**Mervyn Kohler, Fuel Poverty Advisory Group**

## Council-owned solar energy

Evidence shows that solar energy not only significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions and improves air quality, but also offers a positive community investment for councils, reducing bills for councils and tenants.

Solar projects already operating in the city have generated significant additional revenue for universities and schools, providing cheaper clean energy and returns on investment by exporting surplus back into the grid. [19]

Other council-owned solar projects across the UK have resulted in benefits for city councils, in some cases seeing energy bills reduce by more than £90,000. [20]

Work is already underway for a solar farm near Sussex University. A budget for a feasibility study would allow the Council to explore these options fully as well as estimate the cost-savings of a council-run solar farm for Brighton and Hove. Ahead of the Government's decision to abandon favourable rates for paying back into the grid, this investment is not just about the environment but also about council taxpayers saving money.

## 3. A cleaner, greener city

### Protecting our parks

City parks have suffered significant cuts in previous years, affecting the safety, and beauty of our communal green spaces.

Evidence from the Forestry Commission shows that 11% of parks maintenance budgets are spent on repairing or replacing vandalised or misused items in parks.[21] Research also shows that more regular interventions from park wardens prove to be the most effective way to reduce anti-social behaviour and increase community use of parks. The Labour Council does not provide a year-round park security service, despite a successful trial of park security which helped reduce anti-social behaviour.

Green amendments will boost the park wardens' budget so that this service can continue, addressing anti-social behaviour in city centre parks by continuing the use of security patrols and extending them to cover the entire year. They will also reduce the effects of litter by introducing a weekend, year-round emptying of bins in city centre parks.

Safe, clean spaces encourage people to walk more and therefore offer significant health benefits.

### Time for food waste recycling

The collapse of private sector giant Carillion reminds us that some private companies have not only failed to provide the services that Councils need, they have failed to do so in a cost-effective way.

The Greens want to see better accountability from our external providers. In a survey of 1000 members of the public, only 16% think there is adequate regulation of private companies running public services. [22]

A 30-year long 'Private Finance Initiative' with Veolia has locked the Council into a £1bn waste management deal that rules out recycling of most plastics and does not cover food waste recycling. We spend more than £1m a month on this contract. Recent cuts have also left City Clean without sufficient budget to manage the volume of rubbish we produce. Despite public support for food waste recycling, 30% or more of the refuse we send for incineration in Newhaven is food waste.

There are alternatives to sending food waste for incineration we should be making the most of this resource. In administration Greens funded research into food waste recycling and our amendment will revive this area of work.

**“increases in dry recycling and food waste collection mean that local authorities can switch to a fortnightly or three-weekly residual collection, which can reduce collection costs by around 25%.”[23]**

**Renewable Energy Association**

## 4. A fairer budget

Instead of taking from one service to pay for another, our proposals are based on positive actions that seek to increase the income of the Council, without shouldering the burden of a rising cost of living on those who are already vulnerable or on low incomes.

### Buses and bikes, not parking perks

Currently the Council loses in excess of £30,000 a year providing free parking for Brighton and Hove City Councillors in Norton Road Car Park and the Lanes. Removing this perk would free up extra money to spend on public services at a time of budget cuts.

Encouraging alternative forms of transport such as cycling or taking the bus would also help the city meet its own transport and air quality targets.

Greens want to use the money saved from this amendment to prevent a planned cut to school transport. Currently 354 children with special education needs, disability or mobility problems receive assistance getting to and from school.[24] If Councillors were prepared to forgo parking perks, they could ensure more children receive assistance with school travel.

### Raising income without robbing services

Our budget plans generate increased revenue through challenging how much the Council can bring in from services such as parking and adjusting fees and charges. Work done by Greens on last year's budget proves that money can be raised by asking people who can afford to pay more to do so. The income this produces can then be spent protecting lifelines for those who cannot pay.

#### For example:

- Comparison with other councils found that Brighton and Hove has historically charged much less than others for many property services. Croydon, for example, charge £260 to conduct a 'land charge search' for property buyers and Bedford Council charge £169. We want to make sure we are charging a reasonable amount for these services – evidence from last year showed that fee adjustments worked, ensuring that this part of the council's work does not come at a cost to other services.

## 5. Spend to save – the value of prevention

Instead of taking from one service to pay for another, our proposals are based on positive actions that seek to increase the income of the Council, without shouldering the burden of a rising cost of living on those who are already vulnerable or on low incomes. The Council's own Fairness Commission has strongly made the case for early intervention, outlining how partners and decision makers need to see it as "investment to save" in all areas.

Community and voluntary organisations that provide support across diverse areas and communities in our city, from mental health work, health and wellbeing initiatives and support for adults with learning disabilities have expressed serious concerns about the impact of this year's cuts budget, which comes on top of the damage already done by cuts in the previous year. Cuts in this area will often harm marginalised residents who have little option to accept or reject the changes.

### Some evidence from local groups includes:

- Particular alarm over the state of social care. Local organisations have stated that families 'are at breaking point.'
- An increase in the number of referrals of people with complex problems who previously had access to a key worker or social worker. 18% of Community Navigation cases Apr-Sep 2017 were identified as complex, compared with 4% in 2014.[25]
- An increasing number of service users need home care and residential support, as demand continues to rise. A recent survey of 47 of the city's GPs found that 93% said further cuts to adult social care in the Council's budget would make finding appropriate care 'much worse.' [27]

Millions will be lost from children and adult social care budgets this year, but protecting these services will save the Council money, an approach backed by hard evidence. [26]

Services that prevent a crisis and keep our communities safe and well should be prioritised and properly funded. The scale of cuts cannot be redressed by the six amendments allowed by an opposition group. However our amendments seek to minimise the impact of huge cuts in social care, by putting money back in to the following:

- **Clermont House Family Assessment Service** - The Clermont is a specialist centre providing a range of support services for families to help prevent children being taken into care. This includes specialist substance misuse services for parents, psychotherapy and psychiatry. The centre also provides support and training for social workers. Green amendments will reverse the £75k planned cut to this vital service.
- **Wellington House** - Wellington House provides a range of services to adults with learning disabilities and people with profound sensory and/or physical needs. A specialist unit also offers care for those with dementia. Following previous cuts, Green amendments will return £50k to ensure the centre has a future.

**"Decision makers must be brave to invest in preventive activity of proven cost-effectiveness, even if the benefits may not be seen for a decade or more."**

**Public Health England**

## **Conclusion**

Although we cannot provide more than six amendments to the administration's budget, our suggestions seek to enable the Council to reverse some of the worst of the planned cuts, to create new services and support existing services that generate savings and positive outcomes for our city.

## Appendix A: Green Amendments

### Green Group Amendment 1

It is proposed that the following additional resources are raised towards the General Fund revenue budget for 2018/19 through changes to recurrent income:

- Amend the forecasts of income from on-street and off-street parking, based on current in-year financial performance, increasing the projected annual income by £0.140m and thereby increasing the parking surplus. The surplus, as required by regulations, is used to fund qualifying expenditure under section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended. As qualifying expenditure currently exceeds the parking surplus by over £1m, this will reduce the level of General Fund resources required to support qualifying expenditure by £0.140m in 2018/19;
- Change CON29R land search charges to reflect practice in other Local Authorities. Currently BHCC does not differentiate between residential and commercial properties when providing these searches. The proposal is to (a) Increase CON29R from £100 to £120 (before VAT) with respect to residential properties, (b) Set CON29R at £150 (before VAT) with respect to commercial properties. This will increase income, and therefore the contribution toward associated costs and overheads, by £0.060m. Increasing the contribution toward costs and overheads will reduce the General Fund resources required to support this budget area by £0.060m.

These proposals will increase income (actual and forecast) and as a secondary consequence will release recurrent General Fund resources of £0.200m for the General Fund in 2018/19.

## Green Group Amendment 2

Should Amendment 1 pass, it is proposed that the resources this makes available to the General Fund contingency be used as follows in the 2018/19 budget:

- Reverse the proposed cut to the Clermont Family Assessment Centre at a cost of £0.075m;
- Reverse the proposed cut to Day Options for people with Learning Disabilities at Wellington House, at a cost of £0.050m;
- Fund £1.120m of unsupported borrowing over a period of 40 years in respect of assets with an estimated life of 40 years to be used as set out in Amendment 5, at a capital financing cost of £0.065m;
- £0.010m for additional cycle parking facilities.

## Green Group Amendment 3

It is proposed that the following changes are made to the General Fund Capital Programme allocations for 2018/19:

- Reduce the capital allocation to refurbish Hove Station footbridge to £0.200m, which sum will still allow surveys and inspections to be undertaken to inform the required business case. This will release £0.300m;
- Reduce the capital allocation to Brighton Town Hall Workstyles by £0.750m, which still leaves a total capital allocation of £1.500m for the Brighton Town Hall Workstyles scheme. This will release £0.750m;
- Raise additional unsupported borrowing of £1.120m, to be repaid using revenue funding of £0.065m identified in Amendment 2 above.

These proposals will generate a total capital sum of £2.170m. The proposed use of these funds is set out below.

- Of the re-allocated capital amount, £0.075m to be used towards key sustainability feasibility studies as follows:
  - o Provide the necessary match funding required to pursue District Heat initiatives at a cost of £0.025m;
  - o Provide the necessary funding to research the installation of a Solar Farm on the BHCC estate at a cost of £0.025m;
  - o Provide funding to revisit and update for the current context of food waste collection initiatives previously researched by this council, at a cost of £0.025m.
- Of the re-allocated capital amount, £0.100m to be used to provide continuity funding for the Warm Safe Homes grant, part of the revised Disabled Facilities Grant;
- In order to enable the implementation of the Notice of Motion (NoM) regarding 'council owned short-term homelessness accommodation' agreed by full Council on 14 December 2017, use the proposed unsupported borrowing (£1.120m) together with the remaining re-allocated capital resources (£0.875m), in accordance with the terms of the NoM, to undertake work towards purchasing property in the city to be used for emergency accommodation.

## Green Group Amendment 4

It is proposed that the following one-off income is raised towards the General Fund revenue budget for 2018/19:

- Given the significant savings generated in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), in part, enabled by the work of the Corporate Procurement & Contract Management team, it is proposed to charge the HRA revenue budget (by reducing the Direct Revenue Funding budget) an appropriate proportion of the cost of this work for the remaining two years of the Procurement & Contract Management business case. This will generate a one-off resource over two years of £0.060m per year;
- Of the £0.270m one-off resources set aside in the 2018 /19 budget for the cost of the May 2019 local elections, reprofile £0.050m to the 2019/20 financial year.

These proposals will generate one-off income of £0.050m in 2018/19 and income over two years of £0.060m per year.

It is proposed that the resources generated be used as follows:

- £0.060m for two years towards the cost of (a) addressing anti-social behaviour in city centre parks by continuing the use of security patrols at a cost of £0.032m (b) introducing a weekend, year-round Cityparks emptying of litter bins in city centre parks, at a cost of £0.028m. This funding supports the transformation project linked to the new Field Officer role by reducing the likely burden of anti-social behaviour and improving park environments to encourage more diverse use (e.g. reducing rubbish by removing full park bins), allowing the full potential of the Field Officer role to be explored and the final costs of the service to be minimised.
- £0.050m to boost existing Housing First resources to support more rough sleepers into permanent accommodation.

## Green Group Amendment 5

It is proposed that an additional cut be made to the General Fund revenue budget for 2018/19:

- Remove free parking rights for BHCC Councillors at the Norton Road car park and at the Lanes car park, saving £0.030m.

This proposal will generate recurrent income of £0.030m (net of costs) for the General Fund through increased off-street parking revenues.

It is proposed that the resources generated be used as follows:

- Reduce the proposed saving on Home to School transport by £0.030m.

## Green Group Amendment 6

It is proposed that the following changes are made to the HRA Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2018/19. The changes concern the sum of £0.170m added to the HRA Direct Revenue Funding revenue budget by amendment at 8th February 2018 PR&G Committee.

£0.060m of the Direct Revenue Funding budget is potentially allocated through Amendment 4. This leaves £0.110m HRA Direct Revenue Funding, which it is proposed to redirect this budget resource as follows:

- £0.030m (one-off in 2018/19) for a programme of installation of Wi-Fi in sheltered housing schemes and £0.005m recurrent from 2019/20 for ongoing license costs;
- £0.050m (recurrent) to support core Estate Development Budget expenditure;
- £0.030m (recurrent) towards additional staffing resources needed to ensure that the HRA capital New Homes and Buy Back initiatives are implemented according to programme.

# End-notes

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- 3) Brighton and Hove City Council, Policy Resources and Growth Committee, 30th November 2017 – Budget
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- 14) Fuel Poverty is measured using the 'Low Income, High Costs' indicator, defined as where full spend on fuel costs would leave a household with residual income below the official poverty line: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>
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**Green Party**  
for the common good