

Statement from the Liberal Democrat and Independent Group Amendment to the Labour Group Amendment to the Bradford Council Budget and Council Tax Proposals for 2021/22

18th February 2021

This document has been produced by the Liberal Democrat and Independent Group. It is an amendment to the Council's Budget. It has been produced to highlight some of the areas the Liberal Democrat Group believes the Council should do differently. To produce a full Liberal Democrat budget we definitely would not start from here however the Labour group has removed specific support from the Liberal Democrat and Independent Group so we must work with the limited resources available to us.

The Liberal Democrat and Independent budget for 2021/2022 seeks to change the Council's budget and subsequent Labour amendment sharpen the focus on tackling inequality and respond to the threat of climate change.

Tackling Inequality

It is the truth that some people simply do not have the same opportunities or resources to succeed purely based on their local context. We believe that many of the factors driving these inequalities are within the reach of the Council. A Liberal Democrat Council would tackle these inequalities.

Economically inequalities are hugely costly. The burden of ill-health and lost opportunity caused by the failure of Children's Services in Bradford and continuing poor educational achievement, low standards of housing and the quality of our environment leads to greater use of health and social care services, higher unemployment and lower productivity and economic performance. These challenges cannot be solved by the Council giving away cash or raising the bar to accessing services. This process simply cements inequality into the system leading to fewer high quality jobs, poorer quality housing, lower family incomes which perpetuate disadvantage and inequality.

A Liberal Democrat Council would use its powers and taxes to close the inequality gap right across the District and fundamentally change the conditions into which people are born, live and work.

Responding to the Climate Emergency

Covid-19 has changed the world, and its tragedy will be felt for years. Its disruption gives us an inkling of what a threat to our world comes from the climate change. A Liberal Democrat Council will put at its heart a green thread of urgent action to protect our natural environment and to increase and protect our access to green spaces for everyone. We were proud to support the Council to becoming one of the first in the country to declare a climate emergency but this has to be followed up by bold actions. Tackling the climate crisis will

need significant structural change to improve the conditions in which we are born, live and work if we are not to be significantly disrupted by climate change.

In the light of the agreement on the urgency of tackling the climate emergency we are astonished to find a Labour Group running a consultation on the future of our District. This is at a time when meetings and discussions cannot take place, when large numbers of people are unable to access the plans electronically and everyone is struggling with their own response to the global pandemic. The reason for doing this is at best thoughtless and at worst a deliberate attempt to force through unacceptable changes to our futures and our planet.

For the Liberal Democrat Group our amendments to the Councils budget are as follows:

Proposals for amendments to tackle inequality

We remain committed to supporting children and young people, and this is even more important given the disproportionate and inequitable impact of Covid-19 on their education and mental health.

Supporting Children's Services and tackling inequality

This Liberal Democrat budget amendment would see:

An additional £3m per year into Children's Services Base Budget funded from reserves for each of the following three years on an invest-to-save basis. This is to support service transformation leading to a reduction in demand and the reduction in the costs of agency staff and out of authority placements.

The appointment of an independent Children's Commissioner for the District, with particular focus on monitoring the post Covid-19 education recovery plan, making sure it is maintained and gets to where it is needed. This would be funded by a £250k initial set-up costs to fund a new Office of a Children's Commissioner for the District part funded (£100k per year) by a redirection of the Child Friendly District project with the balance to be met from reductions in Children's Services costs made possible by the additional £3m growth provided. Further budget provision will be made in future years when the post is created and the costs of the Children's Commissioner's Office are known.

£150k per year to fund additional support for Children's Services Scrutiny to work to the Office of the Children's Commissioner funded initially from the Risk and Transition Reserve and then from the Council's base budget. This will be funded in future years from additional efficiencies including a reduction in the significant ongoing-revenue expenditure on marketing and consultants.

Permanently delete the 2021/22 £513k cut to Youth Services. To be funded from 2022-3 onwards from additional efficiencies including a reduction in the ongoing-revenue expenditure on marketing, consultants and extra expenses for Executive members.

A £500,000 Well-Being Support fund to support children and young people given the disproportionate and inequitable impact of Covid-19 on their mental health. This will increase investment in services to all young people allowing all areas have access to Youth work and mental health support. This will pay for additional staff and support for youth work not provided by the Council. This will be funded for each of the next three years from the Covid-19 Recovery Fund.

An additional £1 million pounds to provide additional mental health support to children and young people.

Responding to the Climate Emergency

Liberal Democrats in Bradford will match our focus on green infrastructure, industry, transport and employment with a focus on cleaner streets, rejuvenated parks, green spaces and waterways. In streets and neighbourhoods across the district we want to see an end to the shame of fly tipping, vandalism and abandoned buildings and land.

The last years' experience has highlighted the importance of the local environment and green space for recreation, and has revealed some of the problems with safe and equitable access which the Liberal Democrats see as key to supporting everyone to improve their physical and mental health.

We welcome the Council budget proposals to increase funding for street cleaning and ward teams. We would wish to provide additional focus to the work by re-structuring the teams to include the addition of **an Environmental Warden and a Community Based Park Warden**. These posts would be tasked alongside the Neighbourhood Wardens, Parking Enforcement Wardens and Cleansing staff to specifically develop the natural environment and access to green spaces. This would be funded by a reduction in the budget set aside to cover non-pay inflation for each of the next two years and from 2024 onwards from additional efficiencies. These posts would be responsible for a **Ward-based Environmental Action Plan** which would include work to reduce the number of empty homes and derelict buildings, increase rates of recycling, work with schools and large employers to develop and implement active travel plans.

These posts would be supported by a **£1.5 million Environmental Action Budget** funded from the Risk and Transition Reserve. This "green" fund would be administered by the Area Committee in conjunction with Ward Councillors. The Environmental Action Budget would be used to increase diversity in our green spaces and verges, support the development of Community Orchards and Community Growing projects, seek to end chemical spraying of weeds and move towards a planet friendly means of weed control.

In addition to the Environmental Action Budget we would also create an **Access for All budget of £500,000** from the Covid-19 Recovery budget to ensure that everyone can access public footpaths and bridleways.

The creation of a public facing **Energy Efficiency Officer** to support residents who wish to reduce their energy consumption and carbon emissions. The post holder will establish a **fund from the Risk and Transition reserve to purchase on a large scale, carbon reduction measures such as solar panels**, using the Councils purchasing power and scale, and support residents through to installation. The scheme should include a £1 million budget for householders to borrow the costs and repay over time funded from the Risk and Transition budget.

All of these measures should be focused on increasing the use of locally raised taxes to respond to the climate emergency and reduce the incidences of ill health in people. Our focus on using environmental improvements and increasing access to green spaces both improves our natural environment and leads to healthier lives. This generates an economic return that outweighs the public health investment and improves physical resilience leading to longer, healthier lives opening the way for everyone to achieve their full potential.

Strategic Investment of Council Taxes.

The Council has in recent years created a Strategic Investment budget through which it seeks to generate additional income through its Strategy for Growth. This has led to the purchasing and investment in commercial properties and activities which we believe do not specifically tackle inequality.

A Liberal Democrat budget amendment would pause and review the Strategic Investment Budget. One thing that Covid-19 has taught us is the importance of open space, the natural environment and of nature and bio-diversity in itself. This is not just an issue of public health it is also vital to the very health of our planet.

Liberal Democrats would redirect the Strategic Investment Budget to **fund investment in the rivers, waterways and water collection and cleaning processes (blue infrastructure) and the green infrastructure of the district and community infrastructure** as our response to tackling inequality and climate change.

Work in this area would, for the Liberal Democrats, include the **development of a network of urban and rural nature reserves and parks**. Creating new Country Parks to link residents across the adjoining green infrastructure (for example to the Leeds West Country Park and the Yorkshire Dales) creating opportunities for everyone to experience nature on their doorsteps, work places and easy access to the wider countryside for leisure activities.

Liberal Democrats would also invest in houses to rent. Bradford has by an insufficient number of homes to rent demand for which cannot be met by private landlords alone. Labours failure to register landlords has also seen insufficient progress with improving the private rented housing stock. Liberal Democrats believe that investment in building more accessible, environmentally sound social housing is necessary to tackle inequality and climate change. We would redirect Labours programme of investing in commercial property to investment in social housing.

Liberal Democrats investment in Community buildings and spaces

The importance of local support services and the inequity of their availability throughout the pandemic is notable. Many community assets have suffered loss of income and will struggle to re-open with increased expenses. The Liberal Democrats would provide a Community Assets Fund to enable Community Buildings to re-open, re-start services and open space for community-based activity on an invest to save basis.

Recovering City and Urban village centre post Covid-19

During the lockdown many people have worked from home. People have got used to shopping on line or in local centres. These habits will and probably should continue after lockdown. This will have a significant impact on current plans for the city centre and transport which need reassessing.

Liberal Democrat would like to see the establishment of an all-party review of current plans for the City centre in the light of reduced footfall from office based staff in the centre and reduced demand for retail. The group would investigate and report on opportunities to prevent 'white elephant' office space for example, prevent the slow disintegration of heritage buildings and any further investment in poorer quality city centre flats. The aim of the review would be to: create more green-space and spaces for nature in the city and other urban spaces, reduce the number of empty and derelict buildings and increase the number of accessible homes with gardens.

