

Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendments

February 2024

The Liberal Democrat Group propose the following twelve amendments to the budget amendments:

Protecting the most vulnerable

(1) Increase the Hardship Fund and extend eligibility (£250,000)

Extend the Council Tax Support Scheme for the year 2024/25 to support those residents who are struggling through the cost-of-living emergency but fall just outside the current eligibility criteria and therefore do not currently qualify for council tax support.

(2) Reduce the increase in Bromley's London Affordable Rent and social housing rent (£35,000)

The Council is proposing to increase the rent it charges residents in homes managed by Bromley Council by 7.7%. We propose to reduce this to 4% to make the increase more affordable for Bromley Council's most vulnerable tenants.

(3) Boost Council housing initiatives to provide better accommodation and reduce the need for temporary housing (£150,000)

Increase Council Officer capacity to speed up current work on increasing the local social housing supply and investigate key approaches to find new accommodation sites and use of Council powers to bring long-term empty properties back into use.

With the cost of accommodation so significant and the need of Bromley residents so urgent the additional funding is needed to supercharge the Council's ambitions.

(4) Invest in transitional housing to support Bromley's homeless (£900,000)

Work with 'Bromley Homeless' to deliver a transitional housing site to support rough sleepers make the transition into social housing. Often rough sleepers end up in expensive short-term accommodation without the support they need. Transitional housing will save money over time by reducing the use of expensive temporary housing. This is an invest to save initiative.

(5) Provide a grant for voluntary organisations paying rent to the Council to help with the rent increase (£200,000)

The Council has already considered a payment management plan for Voluntary Sector Organisations facing a 30%+ increase in rent on Council-owned property. However, long-term payment plans may affect the viability of some voluntary organisations continuing. Offering a grant that voluntary organisations can use to pay unaffordable rent increases will protect such organisations and the valuable work they do in our community.

Supporting community priorities

(6) Stop the planned cuts to youth service budget (£250,000)

The Council are planning savings of £250,000 in the youth service budget over the next two years. Savings made in youth services must be re-invested to expand provision for young people. Additional budget is needed to help our young people thrive in our community, limit exposure to anti-social behaviour and crime, expand the provision of extra-curricular activities and increase school-based counselling.

(7) Improve air quality by extending anti-idling Initiative (£80,000 over 3 years)

Currently the Council's anti-idling enforcement is only conducted outside schools. Due to resource constraints other idling hotspots identified by residents are not enforced. A three-year project is proposed to expand the Council's anti-idling program to cover these hotspots and to deliver a community awareness program, air quality monitoring, more signage and additional enforcement.

(8) Additional funding for minor road safety interventions (£135,000)

Road safety issues are one of the most significant concerns of our residents. Whilst it is expected that major highway and road safety projects will take time, minor interventions such as signage, road markings and vehicle activated signs should be delivered quickly. Currently there is a lengthy waiting time for these simple interventions. The additional £150,000 will provide additional capacity to speed up responses.

(9) Set up a Voluntary Fund for resident donations to support community organisations (£10,000)

Provide Council Officer time to investigate options to establish an independent charitable fund to receive donations from Bromley residents. The fund would be used to support local voluntary and community groups or projects that make a difference to the lives of all residents in Bromley. Different models are used by other local authorities such as the London Borough of Richmond.

(10) Safeguard the borough's heritage buildings (£75,000)

Provide additional resources to undertake a project to assess, prioritise and safeguard heritage buildings in the borough, ensuring that our valuable buildings have the right protection or have a pathway to get the right protection. The additional budget will be used to boost the Council's heritage conservation capacity.

Accessible Council Services

(11) Install card payment parking meters at key locations (£80,000)

The removal of all cash parking meters for on street parking and in Council owned car parks continues to be a source of widespread complaints across the borough, with some residents being unable or unwilling to use RingGo, or concerned about the RingGo charge that has increased parking charges. There have also been reports that parking in some locations has reduced, which in turn reduces footfall and accessibility to some of our town centres, shopping parades and public services. This funding would support the installation of parking meters that accept payment by card in key locations (as requested by residents). There is funding available in unallocated S106 Local economy and Town Centres that Council Officers confirm can be used for this purpose.

(12) Develop a Digital Inclusion Strategy (£75,000)

Funding for a 12-month project to develop and implement a Digital Inclusion Strategy that will help reduce the digital divide in Bromley. The strategy will identify where digital exclusion might be occurring and find ways to help. It will set out policies and practices that will ensure that Council decision-making considers increasing digital inclusion through a range of high-quality online services and provides robust alternatives to those that cannot use online services.

Funding the amendments

Detailed funding streams to support the above budget amendments are identified in appendix 1. The main funding sources are summarised below:

- £785,000 saving to be found in the Councils budget to refurbish the new Council Offices in the old Direct Line building.
- £411,000 windfall to the Council from the business rate levy adjustment.
- £80,000 from the £600K+ unallocated S106 contributions made by developers for Local Employment and Town Centre to be used to fund card payment parking meters in key locations. Noting the ongoing maintenance costs of the machines should be self-funding from parking revenue.
- £1,194,000 additional income from Council Tax on second homes between 2025-2028 to fund housing and rent initiatives.
- £900,000 from the Invest to Save earmarked reserve to provide the bulk of the funding to invest in Transitional Housing.
- Officers to identify alternative funding or savings to meet the cost of the support for voluntary groups and youth services in three years from 2025/26.
- £109,000 from the Central Contingency Sum for one year only and therefore not a recurring contribution.