

Amendment to 2021-22 Budget Proposals tabled by Councillor Anton Georgiou at Full Council on 22 February 2021

A FAIRER, BETTER BRENT

Brent has been hit hard by the global pandemic. Harder than most boroughs. My proposals recognise the huge challenges and seek to minimise the financial burden placed on residents as the long term economic implications of this period become more apparent.

As a Liberal Democrat representative on Brent Council, I oppose Labour's proposals to hike Council Tax by nearly 6% (4.99% Brent element and almost 1% by the Labour Mayor of London)

I have always been determined to protect the interests of local people and I believe that the Council Tax rise, can be and should be halved. This can be achieved by ensuring that one off expenditure is paid for from some of the substantial reserves that local people have already paid for through their Council Tax.

In addition, I have identified specific areas of spend that seek to address some of the most critical issues identified by local residents and seek to alleviate some of the inequalities exposed over the course of the pandemic, particularly for our young people.

REVENUE PROPOSALS

This can be achieved by making the following adjustments to the Labour Administrations proposals:

- Reducing Labour's proposed Council Tax rise by half costing £3,900,000
- Investing in our young people by providing youth activity grants for Sports and Leisure over the coming year costing £250,000
- Making cycling safer by carrying out urgent road safety repairs on busy cycle routes costing £250,000
- Returning litter bins to local streets, (including TfL hoop styled bags on lampposts, with regular emptying) costing £300,000
- Improved cleaning of trouble hotspots and enhancing our enforcement capability costing £300,000 (*this will be partially offset by fines and reduced dumping in future years, so is an investment in our community*).

TOTAL: £5,000,000

This will be funded by:

- Eliminating duplicate reserve "allowance for uncertainty" saving £1,000,000
- Funding LLW Growth of £1,500,000 from the existing specific LLW £6,000,000 reserve saving £1,500,000
- Funding proposed extra £1,000,000 spend on PPE from the existing specific £3,000,000 Public Health Reserve saving £1,000,000
- Funding homelessness pressures of £1,500,000 from the specific Homelessness Grant Reserve of £8,500,000 saving £1,500,000

TOTAL: £5,000,000

IN CONCLUSION

The way that the Budget information is presented in this Report and what went to Cabinet is not transparent enough. Just as an example, it is not clear from the figures, how much the

Council spends on street cleaning or refuse collection, recycling, or youth services or libraries, everything is lumped together with very little detail.

My review has however identified that over the years the Council has been putting Council Tax payer's money aside for future events that may or may not arise. As a result, existing Council Tax payers have already paid a substantial amount of money for something that may arise in the future, sometimes many years from now, in some cases when they are no longer residents of Brent. In total, the Council has built up £94,000,000 in various revenue reserves. (*Appendix K: Projected Reserves Position*).

There is for example a £6,000,000 reserve paying for London Living Wage. Yet, while this year's Budget estimates a £1,500,000 spend on LLW, Council Tax payers are being asked to pay more while the reserve that they have already paid for to build this up, is not used at all.

The Council also expects that homelessness pressures will cost an extra £1,500,000 this year. The Council has however received a specific homelessness grant and £8,500,000 of this has been put aside into a specific reserve – and once again none of this is being used for the specific costs identified.

None of my proposals suggest that the existing General Reserve of £15,000,000 should be touched. I do believe however, that the Council should be more transparent about all of its other reserves as this is already money that in most cases our Council Tax payers have already paid for.

As a result of my proposals the element of Council Tax imposed on local authorities by the Conservative Government to fund Adult Social Care is untouched. Our most vulnerable residents must continue to get the support they need and deserve.

I am proud to make these proposals that take into account both the severe financial burden our local residents are facing right now but also seek to address some of their most pressing needs to improve our community, and I urge my Council colleagues to back them.

Cllr Anton Georgiou