

Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendments 2026-27

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Labour politicians – locally and nationally –repeatedly express concern about the cost-of-living crisis and then the Labour Government:

- A. Forces Brent Council to raise the Brent Council Tax by 5% this year and demand another 5% rise next year and 5% rise the year after. This is at a time when the Labour Council has imposed a large cut in Council Tax Support for those in most need.
- B. Increases in National Insurance on business employing staff with the direct result of increasing unemployment especially for young people.
- C. Increasing income tax by stealth, as well as on savings, directly depriving working people and pensioners at a time when they need the money most to pay for rising bills.
- D. Depriving Pensioners of their winter fuel allowance with a permanent loss for all of them last year and permanent loss for a large proportion of them in this financial year and in the years to come.

FUNDING REFORM FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

For years Labour Councillors were claiming that things would be better under Labour. The proposed reforms and the Financial Settlement do not go far enough. The problem of rising Adult Social Care and Homelessness Costs which have led to successive years of overspending by the Labour Council in Brent have still not been addressed. The Labour Mayors decision to reduce the affordable homes target will just continue to make this problem worse.

The Labour Government continues to pass the cost burdens in these areas onto local people, hence another inflation busting Council Tax rise.

The Labour Government, as well as the Council Leadership and Cabinet members then went on to issue what we feel are misleading claims about an increase in the Brent Council's "spending power" neglecting to mention that a large part of this relates to the 5% Council Tax rises imposed this year and in future years.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

For years the Liberal Democrats have been calling for use of the money generated from developers on Brent's crumbling roads, pavements neglected parks and open spaces.

The Labour Leadership failed to listen and the lack of investment over the past 3 years only made the neglect worse and increased costs which could have been avoided had essential maintenance been carried out at the right time.

What is clear is that the Labour Councillors were hoarding the money for a pre-election spree so that 6 months before the May 2026 local election and far too late money is being spent which was not in the original 2025/26 budget. As always happens with panic spending measures the money will not be spent as efficiently as it could have been.

This spending spree includes a large number of 12-month contracts – but none of these roles are committed to past 2026. Reinforcing the point that Labour only care about election years.

INVESTING YEAR ON YEAR

Timing of local elections should not influence Brent Council's spending plans. As a result of past Labour Administrations poor decisions there is a massive backlog of work.

Liberal Democrats will start tackling some of this backlog by investing the funds available on an annual basis – with a particular focus on Residents priorities: Safe Roads, Clean streets and Tackling Crime / ASB - while also ensuring that we rebuild reserves.

The 4 year programme of renewal will start in 2026/27 ensuring value for money and efficient use of resources by, where appropriate, linking the Council investment with works undertaken by Utility Companies.

Cllr Paul Lorber – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

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Liberal Democrat Amendments to the 2026-27 Budget

1. Making Safe Roads and Pavements Safe

The Labour Council is failing to keep roads and pavements safe and accessible across the borough.

The current Highways Programme barely scratches the surface of repairs that are desperately needed. It would cost £44.7m to repair all of the highest priority roads in Brent and £310.7m for all pavements. These numbers will only increase unless the Council takes drastic steps.

The Labour council has now allocated £80m of SCIL – almost all available funds not “committed” - to a wide range of infrastructure projects. However many of these are not due to be delivered for years, by which time more CIL will have been received (including up to £20m forecast in 2026/27, of which £16m would be SCIL).

Our roads and pavements need a major investment **now** - and **Labour has no plan to tackle this**. Given the scale of the challenge the Council must commit to wholesale repairs of some of the worst affected areas – using the funds we have today.

PROPOSAL:

1. To commit £30m from current SCIL for a major programme of road & pavement resurfacing in the areas with the largest amount of new developments - as these roads have been impacted by the both the works themselves and the increase in traffic / parking.
2. To commit £1.5m to the reactive repairs team – enabling them to both repair more reported defects, and be more proactive in repairing whole stretches of road as required.
3. To double the proposed NCIL investment in maintaining and improving Traffic Calming measures from £300,000 to £600,000.
4. Proactively plan to link pavement and road upgrades to major works undertaken by utility companies, to minimise future disruption and to achieve economies of scale in savings, in overall costs to the Council.

Total spending £31.8m - £1.5m in revenue, £30m from SCIL, and £300,000 from NCIL

2. Keeping Brent Clean

Residents are angrier than ever about the dirty state of their areas with ever increasing rubbish on our streets. Over the past 16 years this Labour Council has cut services including:

1. Reducing frequency of refuse collections by half
2. Increasing charges for garden waste and bulky waste
3. Cutting the frequency of streets sweeping – it was 3 times per week in 2010!
4. Cutting sweeping near shops and High Streets
5. Removing litter bins from residential streets
6. Introducing Blue bags – resulting in a 50% reduction in recycling of paper and cardboard

Liberal Democrats believe allowing rubbish to build up simply encourages more fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour. The Council must take proactive action to keep Brent clean, instead of shifting the blame and the effort entirely onto residents to report or litter-pick other people's mess.

PROPOSAL:

1. Increase street cleaning budget by £500,000 so that each street is visited and swept once a week and reinstate the daily street cleaning of 50 meters from junctions with busy shopping areas/ high streets.
2. Provide 1,000 lamp post bins across the borough at an estimated cost of £200,000 and involving residents in helping to keep their street clean.
3. Revising the charge for bulky waste collection on the basis of £15 for 1 item and £5 for each additional one at an estimated cost of £40,000. The charge for picking 1 mattress for example should be realistic and not excessive to reduce dumping.
4. Hire 2 permanent dedicated HMO enforcement officers to ensure landlords are held to account for proper waste management and maintenance of their properties at a cost of £120,000. This can be funded from reserves held from the proceeds of the Landlord licensing scheme.
5. Allocating our Neighbourhood Managers a permanent £200,000 discretionary fund for tackling hotspots and general maintenance in their areas in consultation with ward Councillors.
6. Giving Residents a choice of an additional wheelie bin for cardboard and paper in place of the blue bag. (the blue topped bin to be converted for cardboard and paper and a smaller bin supplied for cans, bottles and plastic) - at an estimated capital cost of £750,000 in the first year and £120,000 ongoing capital repayment revenue costs.

Total net spending of £1,810,000 - £750,000 Capital, £1,180,000 Revenue, and £120,000 use of earmarked reserves.

3. Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

Labour is failing to tackle anti-social behaviour in our borough. Local police (especially Safer Neighbourhood Teams) are under-resourced and constantly taken away from their designated wards. The Council does not have enough enforcement staff working during peak hours.

We need more staff to work at times when ASB happens – backed up with communications and smart technology to maximise the impact of increased resources.

PROPOSAL:

1. Hire a new Community Safety Officer to mirror the current set up for Neighbourhood Managers, ensuring that these two vital officers can more effectively work together to tackle priorities in partnership with the Police and Safer Neighbourhood Teams on Anti-Social behaviour hotspots, at a cost of £64,000.
2. Hire five new neighbourhood enforcement officers - one per Connect area - to increase resources across the borough and enable new shift patterns including more late nights – at a cost of £300,000. These staff will be tasked to take action against all forms of anti-social behaviour including fly tipping, street drinking. This additional resource will enable a greater focus on areas like the canal towpath which are currently neglected due to lack of resource, as well working with Property Licensing officers to ensure that landlords across Brent manage their properties properly - ensuring that front gardens are properly maintained and each property has the correct number of refuse bins.

3. Set up an apprenticeship scheme and recruit 10 local young people to aid Neighbourhood Managers in their work to tackle ASB and other local issues at a cost of £400,000.
4. We will invest £50,000 to support frontline staff with smart-tech including AI-enabled Cameras able to alert them to ASB in progress. To be funded from NCIL – doubling the current proposals.
5. We will tackle the illegal use of fireworks by making an additional resource of £20,000 available at times when needed, including for enforcement staff to work late-night shifts.

Total spending of £834,000, £784,000 from revenue plus £50,000 from NCIL

4. Delivering on Climate Emergency Commitments

Six years after this Labour Council declared a 'Climate Emergency', they have failed to act and deliver on the commitments of the declaration.

The Labour Government has ended the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme - leaving Brent's plans to deliver Net Zero for Council buildings unfunded – with works totalling £5.6m outstanding.

To ensure we continue to make progress we must leverage part of the new combined grant from the government, while continuing to invest in our NetZero wider programme.

PROPOSAL:

1. To allocate £500,000 per year to improve the energy efficiency of council buildings, starting with the highest energy saving measures including solar panels for 14 Council buildings to achieve the maximum environmental impact, cost savings in the shortest amount of time. Solar panels alone will achieve an annual revenue saving of £40,000 a year to be reinvested in further environmental projects.
2. To reintroduce a dedicated trees budget of £500,000 to properly maintain and protect the borough's existing mature trees. The funding will also support an ambitious programme of new tree planting, increasing Brent's green canopy, enhancing the look and feel of our streets, parks and public spaces.
3. To work with Brent Cyclists and other local groups to devise an active travel plan of action and allocate £2 million per year over 5 years to develop safe cycle routes within and between growth areas across Brent. This will be funded from SCIL.

Total net spending of £3,000,000 split £1,000,000 from revenue and £2,000,000 from SCIL.

5. Restoring Trust in Local Democracy

This Labour Council has routinely avoided proper scrutiny of its plans. As a result, it has also weakened democratic engagement by centralising power in the Cabinet system and by making a mockery of democratic scrutiny.

The embarrassment of having to remove two Labour Deputy Mayors in some eyes has also brought this Council into disrepute.

The Labour council's centralised approach to allocating NCIL funds is also at odds with other boroughs all over London – where NCIL is allocated ward by ward, based on the relative amount of development, and Councillors are able to influence how it is being spent.

Residents want a Council that listens to them. Liberal Democrats believe our borough needs a democratic reset. This means shifting power away from closed-door decision making towards a more open, committee-based system, ensuring that all voices represented on the Council take active part in decision making.

PROPOSAL:

1. Reduce Cabinet members to six to align with the new Corporate Structure and reduce associated support staff accordingly, saving £270,000.
3. Remove the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Deputy Mayor, saving £4,000.
4. Remove the Special Responsibility Allowances for the Majority Party Whip position, saving £5,000.
5. Reduce the responsibilities of the Mayor to focus primarily on chairing meetings and attending a few major annual events, allowing a reduction in support to one part time officer and one part time driver, saving £55,000.
6. Review the Councillors Support Service to streamline this service with the aim to reduce overall costs.

Total savings of £334,000 from revenue

6. Brent Magazine

A quarterly magazine printed and supposedly delivered to all households, is a luxury that the Council cannot afford. The magazine has clearly been used as a propaganda tool by the Leader and his Cabinet to promote the Labour Party - and delivery has consistently failed in certain parts of the borough. Money wasted on this unnecessary item should be spent on important services instead.

PROPOSAL:

1. Cancel The Brent Magazine and use the savings of £250,000 to fund the critical Council services residents expect like street cleaning and making our borough safe.

Total savings of £250,000 from revenue

7. SCRUTINY LINE BY LINE – DEPARTMENT BY DEPARTMENT BUDGETS

The way the current financial information is provided to Councillors (and the public) makes scrutiny very difficult. The financial crisis facing the Council requires a much more detailed review and scrutiny of how the Council spends its money and earns its income.

Scrutiny should set up small task groups to carry out a systematic review of spending and income generation by each individual unit within the Council and to make recommendations for improvements and change. Each task group should also contain an officer from an unrelated unit to assist in this process.

8. Conclusion

Sadly, after another 4 years of a Labour Administration Brent is in an even bigger mess than before. As soon as residents step outside their front doors they can see crumbling and potholed roads, dirty streets, neglected trees and open spaces and Council Leadership more interested in photo opportunities rather than getting things done.

Brent Council has been accumulating tens of millions of pounds received from developers which could have been invested in improving our area every year since 2022.

Instead, the Labour Leadership has been hoarding the money for a last minute panic spending spree hoping, in our view, to mislead local people just before a local election.

This is residents' money and it needs to be spent wisely and efficiently over the next 4 years to improve Brent in the way local people want and need.

This is why Liberal Democrat Councillors are proposing a large investment on major improvements to the local environment in the coming year and the following 3. Investment and visible works of improvement in each of those 4 years and NOT just a few weeks before a local election.

Supporting these plans will show that the Council is listening to what local people want and need and by making an early decision on 23 February start can be made early to ensure that the works are delivered in good time.

9. Summary of Proposals and Sources of Funding

The table below sets out a summary of the proposals and the sources of funding

| Spending Commitments | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Priority Area | Proposal | Cost |
| Tackling ASB | Additional ASB Officer | £ 64,000 |
| Tackling ASB | 5 new Neighbourhood patrol officers | £ 300,000 |
| Tackling ASB | Fireworks Comms & Enforcement | £ 20,000 |
| Tackling ASB | Apprenticeship scheme | £ 400,000 |
| Keeping Brent clean | Large Items collection | £ 40,000 |
| Keeping Brent clean | Replace Blue bags with bins | £ 750,000 |
| Keeping Brent clean | Street cleaning services | £ 500,000 |
| Keeping Brent clean | Neighbourhood Manager Proactive funds | £ 200,000 |
| Keeping Brent clean | HMO enforcement officer | £ 120,000 |
| Keeping Brent clean | Lampost bins | £ 200,000 |
| Climate & NetZero | Brent Council Buildings NetZero Programme | £ 500,000 |
| Climate & NetZero | Trees budget | £ 500,000 |
| Making Roads & Pavements safe | Reactive repairs operations | £ 1,500,000 |
| Making Roads & Pavements safe | Major programme of resurfacing | £ 30,000,000 |
| Climate & NetZero | Cycle routes | £ 2,000,000 |
| Tackling ASB | AI powered cameras | £ 50,000 |
| Making Roads & Pavements safe | Traffic Calming measures | £ 300,000 |
| Total | | £ 37,444,000 |

| Funding Sources | Income |
|---|---------------------|
| Savings (Brent Magazine, Members support) | £ 584,000 |
| Use of reserves (HMO licensing) | £ 120,000 |
| Strategic CIL | £ 32,000,000 |
| Neighbourhood CIL | £ 350,000 |
| Revenue funding | £ 4,390,000 |
| Total | £ 37,444,000 |

10. Advice from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources

Senior finance support has been provided to assist the Liberal Democrat Group to formulate an alternative budget that reflects their policy priorities.

The Alternative Budget proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group would be a legal, balanced budget for 2026/27, although it is recognised that this carries financial risk. The potential implications for 2027/28 and beyond have not been considered as part of these proposals.

Overall, these proposals introduce £37.4m of new spending commitments, balanced by use of Strategic CIL (£32m), Neighbourhood CIL (£0.35m), reserves (£0.12m) and savings of £0.584m. The ongoing revenue implications of these spending commitments is £4.4m, which can be funded from the additional funding announced in the settlement following the Fair Funding Review. Specifically, these proposals remove the £3m investment in public realm that form part of the current Administration's budget, including a partial reduction of £1.6m in the proposed contingency budget. Regarding the latter, this would add an element of risk to the budget in the medium term by limiting the Council's ability to strengthen its financial resilience.

The proposed use of SCIL and NCIL is significant. Any use of SCIL or NCIL requires significant legal due diligence to ensure any expenditure is compliant with grant conditions, such as ensuring any new cycle routes are within and between growth areas in Brent. The budget also reflects a risk arising from the use of SCIL funding that is earmarked for future pipeline projects. If the SCIL forecasts do not materialise as anticipated, the Council may need to cease plans for future pipeline schemes or find alternative funding sources which may include borrowing.

While the proposals add an element of risk to the 2026/27 budget, the budget can be considered balanced and lawful. This is also subject to appropriate due diligence on the use of SCIL and NCIL.

Minesh Patel
Corporate Director of Finance & Resources