Liberal Democrat Amendment to the Council Budget 2018

The Liberal Democrats want to continue to protect frontline services for the people of Stockport. We strongly oppose the continued reduction in funding for local government from the Conservative Government.

1. Funding the Burnham Tax

Greater Manchester residents were given no say in deciding whether to have an elected Mayor and during the Mayoral election campaign there was no mention of introducing an additional cost to our already hard-pressed council tax payers. The Labour Leaders in the West Midlands rightly rejected the plans for a £6m precept by Conservative Elected Mayor, Andy Street. The Labour Elected Mayor in Liverpool City Region has announced he would not charge a precept, as have the Conservative Elected Mayors in Tees Valley and West of England.

The Liberal Democrats believe it is unfair for our residents to pay the Burnham Tax and hope that, if Stockport oppose it locally this year, our colleagues across Greater Manchester will oppose any such tax being levied in future years. We propose to reduce the Council Tax increase proposed by the Labour Cabinet by the amount needed to cover the Burnham Tax for 2018/19.

We propose to reduce the Adult Social Care precept part of the proposed Council Tax increase (as this gives the council maximum flexibility in future years) but we would maintain the level of investment in Adult Social Care as proposed by the current administration. We would cover the budget shortfall for one year from reserves. This equates to a 0.53% reduction in the Labour Council Tax increase and require a one-off transfer of £753k from reserves to support Adult Social Care.

2. Freeze District Centre parking charges

The Liberal Democrats want to freeze parking charges in district centre car parks for 2018/19.

We propose to cover the consequent budget shortfall of £150k for 1 year from a combination of items 2a, 2b and reserves.

2a Enhancing the Business Rates Team

Liberal Democrat councillors have discussed with senior officers the ability to raise more funds through the correct assessment and collection of Business Rates.

Whilst the Council’s collection rates for the collection of Business Rate income are good, it is recognised that they could be improved further with additional capacity for targeted activity.

This is a spend-to-save proposal whereby the existing Business Rates collection team is expanded to include additional Business Rates Inspector capacity and additional dedicated officer capacity to proactively chase unpaid bills. This is estimated to cost £75k and would be part-funded from reserves, part-funded by item 2b below.
Whilst the benefits are hard to predict, the aim of the investment is to increase Business Rates income collected by £300K. It is intended that evaluation of the proposal is undertaken during the year as it is noted that the achievement of this aim will not be known until Quarter 3 of 2018/19 when the Council completes the statutory NDR1 (Business Rates budget) form.

For these reasons the additional Business Rates income expected cannot be included within the Council’s 2018/19 budget, but will be monitored during the year to assess the return on the investment made. It is also noted that any additional Business Rates income achieved will need to be considered as part of the Council’s agreed 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot share with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, resulting in only 50% of the additional income collected currently being able to be recognised in the Council’s 2019/20 budget.

2b Reducing the size of the Cabinet
Given that the scale of council funding has reduced over time and given the cuts experienced by colleagues across the council, the Liberal Democrats recommend the Leader implement a reduction in the size of the cabinet by two members, so it becomes Leader plus five rather than Leader plus seven. This would save approximately £26k in 2018/19 with full year savings of around £30k.

This amendment is accompanied by the Borough Treasurer’s Risk Assessment and amended budget tables drawn up by the council’s finance officers.

Moved: Cllr Mark Hunter
Seconded: Cllr Lisa Smart