

Liberal Democrat Budget Amendment 2021/22 – Putting Power in the Hands of Local People

Liberal Democrats believe that the best decisions are those taken closest to the people they affect. By putting power and money more under the control of local communities, local people can make decisions about how to improve the areas where they live, work and play.

The Lib Dem Group want to build on the successful model of delegated decision making at area committee level so that local people have even more of a say over how the council should prioritise local spending.

Local communities know their area best and know the improvements that would have the most positive impact. Whether it's generating renewable energy, planting a community orchard, trialling average speed cameras or supporting a local makers' market to increase footfall in a district centre, placing budgets under the control of area committees brings the community into the heart of decision making.

In this way, the council would be doing things "with our communities", rather than taking decisions centrally and doing things "to our communities", enabling local people to have a much greater say in determining local priorities.

By contrast, Labour's budget proposals include a range of spending plans being taken centrally by the Cabinet that will then happen in local communities. This is the case even where a delegation already exists for such decisions to be taken by area committees.

A clear example of this is the Parks and Green Space Investment proposal. This is the spending over five years of £2.011m of ring-fenced, commuted sums for outdoor play and sports facilities. This is money already given by developers intended to mitigate the impact of new building developments on the communities in which those developments are built.

According to the council's constitution, such spending is delegated to area committees (Scheme of Delegation, Article 4, paragraph 3), yet a partial list of proposals is given in the budget report and area committees have not been consulted about these.

We assert the right of our area committees to take these decisions and we call on the cabinet urgently to outline the process of agreeing with local councillors how this money will be spent, where and in what order across the five years.

This budget amendment focuses on two elements - improving the local environment while tackling the climate emergency, and regenerating our town and district centres. Both of these will have local communities at the heart of the decision-making process whilst reflecting the urgent need to make funds available to properly tackle the climate emergency, declared by this council meeting almost two years ago, which was the entire focus of the Lib Dem budget amendment last year.

We would do this by:

Increasing the delegated budget by £40k for each ward

This money could be spent on local priorities including junction safety near schools, tree planting, trialling average speed cameras or new bicycle storage facilities. The focus of this additional money should be on measures which have a positive environmental impact. Ward councillors should be left to determine what measures are most suitable for their

area, in consultation with local residents through their area committees. Local communities will be invited to bring forward ideas for projects in their area.

To reflect the additional officer time it would take to support area committees, we would add one MB4 post within the Place directorate to increase capacity, initially for one year.

The cost would be a total of £0.840m for ward budgets plus up to £0.060m including on costs for a staff member.

This would be funded in by using the proposed, centralised Tackling Climate Change funding of £0.600m plus releasing a further £0.300m from reserves.

The ambition would be to maintain this funding in subsequent years but that would be contingent upon the council's finances being robust enough post-pandemic to release further funds from general balances, which would need to be considered as part of next year's budget setting process.

Moving the responsibility for local regeneration to area committees

We would do this by adding four Full-Time Equivalent MB4 Regeneration Officers to the Place directorate for a fixed project initially of one year. Their role would be to work with neighbourhood teams, councillors and the local community to prioritise the identification and delivery of district and local centre regeneration projects before end March 2022, in line with government funding requirements.

This would be funded using the proposed Wider Economic Recovery Investment funding of £2.000m and with the same overall aims of delivering business support and wider economic stimulus, engaging with stakeholders in the identification and development of deliverable projects that can be delivered at pace but also giving Officer support to ward councillors and local communities to ensure their engagement with and support for such projects.

Again, the ambition would be to maintain this funding in subsequent years, subject to the constraints mentioned above, and would need to be considered as part of next year's budget setting process.

Including the Parks and Green Space Investment, this amendment moves almost £5m of planned, centralised spending power into the hands of local communities, so that, working with their councillors, they can ensure that the best value and best impacts are delivered for local residents.

Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer - Risk Assessment

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer has reviewed the amendment and undertaken a risk assessment of the budget proposals as a result. The Deputy Chief Executive's comments are set out below:

The amendment reallocates £0.600m from the £2.1m investment from one-off resources held in earmarked reserves as per section seven of the 2021/22 Cabinet Revenue Budget and proposes a specified use for an element of the £2m proposed Wider Economic Recovery Investment, also detailed at section seven.

The amendment also seeks an additional investment of £0.300m from one-off resources held in reserve; this is in addition to the Cabinet's proposed investment of £2.1m from one-off resources held in earmarked reserves as per section seven of the 2021/22 Cabinet Revenue Budget.

On the basis of the above and the allocation of these resources to nonrecurrent spend, my assessment of the proposed 2021/22 budget remains as set out in the report, i.e. that the estimates made for the purposes of the calculation of the budget are robust and the level of reserves and balances are adequate.

No tables within the budget reports require alteration as a result of this amendment.

Moved by: Cllr Lisa Smart

Seconded by: Cllr Mark Weldon