

The Green group wants to extend our thanks to the finance team and all officers involved in the budgeting process this year – in what has been another challenging year for the Council. The pandemic has presented significant pressures, all of which have been exacerbated by the failure of Westminster to properly fund local government.

We'd also like to thank the other members of the Budget Review Group which has made a series of important recommendations, which we are pleased to see the Cabinet accept many of.

Our budget amendment seeks to ensure those recommendations that have been accepted are implemented effectively and reinstates those recommendations which have been rejected by the Cabinet.

It also seeks to ensure we have a robust financial plan for the medium term, while harnessing the power of this Council to improve the lives of our residents, go further on tackling the climate emergency, and mitigate against the impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

## **Revenue**

On revenue, the Green amendment would deliver a balanced budget over the mid-term financial plan through a range of savings against the administration's budget, while enabling spending in areas where it is needed most and ensuring that savings aren't made where the financial gain is small, but the impact on residents is large.

Our proposed savings would scale back slightly recruitment of additional officer posts in Corporate Property and in law and government. This allows for a modest increase in capacity for capital works and major projects, but provide savings for reallocation elsewhere.

A small additional saving of £2,500 per year is proposed to the miscellaneous "leaders budget" which it has been acknowledged is rarely utilised.

Additional savings are being proposed through increases in park and ride fees in line with an assumed inflationary rate of 3%, and increases in off-street parking charges at a rate of 1.5% in years 2, 3 and 4 of the mid-term financial plan.

Our amendments to the capital budget (discussed below) also relate to items in our proposed revenue budget.

We would use these additional savings and increased revenue to fund the following additional spending:

- Creating a substantial, front-loaded hardship relief fund – a centrally held, discretionary fund which can be distributed to service areas as needed to alleviate the impacts of the ongoing pandemic and cost of living crisis.
- Reversing the proposed cuts to the out of hours noise service
- Reversing the reduction to the vacant Commercial Noise EHO post
- Additional resource for measuring, managing, reporting and auditing carbon reduction, without which we will not have the confidence of knowing that our emissions reduction policies are effective
- The introduction of a biodiversity officer to work with applicants to ensure that new planning requirements for 'net biodiversity gain' are satisfied and effective
- The introduction of a solar projects manager in years 2, 3 and 4 of the mid term financial plan to manage the capital programme discussed below

- Reversing the increase to the garden waste bins concessionary rate

### **Capital budget**

The Green group has long criticised the administration's decision to seek to invest speculatively in commercial property, for which we believe both the business case and the social benefits are unclear. However, we accept that in the near-term the Council is committed to this approach and is close to securing an initial investment of this type. As such are not seeking to remove the £20m worth of investment in 'regeneration' in the first year of the MTFP.

That notwithstanding, we believe that a more sensible investment – financially, ecologically and socially - is in renewable energy. As such, our amendment seeks to replace the £13m 'regeneration' investment in year 3 of the MTFP like-for-like with £13m of investment in solar energy spread across years 3 and 4. This would be a significant contribution to the renewable needs of this city, while providing a modest financial return net of borrowing.