

Green Group Budget Amendment Narrative

Proposer: Councillor Chris Jarvis

Seconder: Councillor Lois Muddiman

The Green Group would like to thank officers for the huge amount of work that has gone into the preparation of this year's budget, particularly in the context of the immense pressure on the council's finances.

In this council, we have often discussed the scale of the challenge that pressure poses. Since 2010, local government has been under assault from central government, with austerity having made it all but impossible for councils like ours to deliver the kind of public services we would want to and the transformation in peoples' lives that we should be able to. This has only been compounded by 14 years of reckless economic policy which has driven increased pressure on services. The cost of living crisis and a lack of protection for private renters driving a homelessness crisis and a rising need for Temporary Accommodation is the most pressing example of this, but it is only the latest.

Despite this context, it is also true that local government does have powers at its disposal to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality and reduce the impacts of central government policies on residents in our city. This council has a strong history of doing just this in a multitude of ways.

This year, the Green Group's amendment to the budget and MTFP has that drive to reduce inequality and disadvantage at its heart.

We are proposing to stop the reduction in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme proposed as part of the administration's budget. This scheme is a crucial lifeline for many of the people in our city who are struggling the most, and it should be preserved.

Alongside this, we are also seeking to stop other measures in the budget and MTFP which we believe will adversely affect the least well off in our city. This includes dropping planned increases in bulky waste collection and the concessionary rate for garden waste bins. Both of these savings proposed as part of the administration's budget are small, and yet would add an unnecessary financial burden on residents, while risking negative environmental impacts including increased burning of green waste and fly tipping.

We also believe that the proposed cuts to voluntary sector grants will have a negative impact on our city, and so our budget amendment proposes to reinstate £150,000 into this budget line across three years.

In addition to seeking to reverse elements of the administration's proposals which we think will hit those who have the least the hardest, our budget amendment is also proposing new spending dedicated to tackling inequality and alleviating poverty in our city. We are proposing to introduce a discretionary hardship fund - money that can be used by the council in a targeted way to provide some alleviation for the cost of living crisis for those in our city who have been hit hardest. This fund would need to be established by Cabinet, and we have intentionally left this as a centrally held fund which could be distributed to service areas as needed, in order to give Cabinet sufficient flexibility on its use, in recognition of the unpredictability in the economy at present and the way in which the cost of living crisis is impacting people continues to change. While the amount of money we are proposing to allocate here is small, its impacts could nonetheless be significant.

We are proposing to finance these additional costs on the budget in the following ways:

- Introducing charging for the first hour at park and rides
- Introducing a greater increase on car parks from year 2 of the MTFP
- Introducing a greater increase on park and ride charges from year 3 of the MTFP
- Reducing the number of cabinet special responsibility allowances from 10 to 8
- Removing the non-statutory deputy leader
- Removing the proposed investment in flower beds at Frideswide Square proposed since the consultation budget
- Selling the Morrell Trophy

Changes to special responsibility allowances, the sale of assets and proposing to remove investment in flower beds are subject to either consultation with the IRP or Cabinet decision and therefore we are proposing reductions in the budgets for these items, with these being the recommended areas from which the savings can be achieved.

While these changes would lead to a slightly greater draw on reserves in the early years of the MTFP, across its full four years, our proposals would lead to a small net increase in reserves.