

Conservative Group budget amendments

Council, 3rd March 2025

Notes on the Conservative Budget Amendment, 2025/2026

A Cleaner Camden:

Restore weekly bin collections to certain streets.

Camden's bi-weekly waste collection throws up detrimental issues where the area of available front space is filled up with large numbers of wheelie bins. This may well get worse in the near future due to changes to recycling management and the separation of materials.

Restoring weekly collections for those with less ability to store all the accumulated rubbish would improve the appearance of both private and public realm.

Make garden waste collection free of charge.

Camden's charge for garden waste is too high. Charging to collect garden waste reduces recycling rates and discourages good environmental stewardship.

We would scrap the charge for garden waste collection immediately and make it free once more.

Open Regis Road refuse and recycling centre for one evening a week.

Regis Road recycling centre is open only until 4:15pm every day. This can make it difficult for non-professionals to use it. We would open the recycling centre one evening a week to make it easier to use it. Savings from reduced fly-tipping are not factored in.

A More Attractive Camden:

More mature replacement trees and tree care.

Too often in recent times, major trees in Camden have had to be felled due to age or disease. In a good number of cases these could be replaced by far larger and more mature specimens. We would fund the planting of much larger trees in crucial locations to preserve the green nature of the borough. As a no cost option we would also reduce the frequency of precautionary pollarding.

Too often residents complain of the continual routine pollarding which strips our trees of their leaves, sometimes on an annual basis. We would reduce this sub-contracted work wherever suitable, delivering significant environmental benefits. Any savings would also be recycled into providing more mature new trees.

Proper Control of Builders

Too many builders ignore the formal route to CPZ suspension and licencing for their skips and materials deliveries. This often results in unsafe and messy encroachment onto the pathways and highways. Our amendment provides for more planning control officers with the specific remit to prevent this type of practice and enforce Construction Management Plans.

A Safer Camden:

Open a police base on the Finchley Road.

With the loss of Police representation in the North of the borough, crime and antisocial behaviour has risen unacceptably in recent years. Finchley Road, from Swiss Cottage northwards, is

effectively a linear commercial focus with high levels of through traffic on the roads and TfL network. This will rise further once the 4,500 extra residents have moved into the developed O2 Centre development. To serve the current and future needs of the area we would propose a new police base either in a unit on the Finchley Road or within the eventual O2 scheme. This should also act as a base for local Safer Neighbourhood Teams. This could be considered as a part of the Section 106 contribution from the project.

Install CCTV in crime hotspots.

We would install more CCTV cameras in crucial hotspots across the borough in order to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and aid the Police.

A Happier Camden:

Make annual grants of £60,000 in Camden's community libraries and extend opening times.

We would make this grant available to the three community libraries within Camden Belsize Community Library, Primrose Hill Library, and Keats Library in Hampstead. This would support valuable community institutions. In order to provide greater services for residents we would increase the opening hours of libraries.

Send information packs to residents when they move in.

When people move (as detected by new registration for Council Tax), residents would be sent an information pack that would be automatically tailored to their circumstances and incorporating key information. This would include local amenities to their home, key contacts in the council, their local police contact, when and how to leave out waste, how private tenants can enforce housing rights, and how to download relevant apps and sign up to relevant email mailing lists.

If a property sits within a Conservation Area or that area has an Article 4 Direction applied, is important information to new residents.

Resume postal notifications of planning applications

The ending of postal notifications left many residents unaware of planning application that are submitted by their direct neighbours and might affect them seriously. Too often people find out too late to make a considered response

A More Efficient Camden:

Renting out one floor of 5 Pancras Square

A considerable part of the office space within 5 Pancras Square remains underutilised and space within it could be let to suitable firms in order to raise revenue. With a good deal of Camden officers working from home, this is ever more the case.

Shared digital services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea.

Camden aimed to share digital services with Haringey and Islington until 2019, before this collapsed due to Camden and their inability to share services. However, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea have had shared digital services for several years and thus would be able to incorporate Camden. Their digital costs are considerably lower than Camden's and sharing digital services would save Camden £1.5m a year. Shared HR, legal, strategy and change, and procurement services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea – In addition to digital costs, Camden should look to share back-office services with boroughs that have done similar. Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea already share HR, legal, strategy and change, and procurement services, and Camden should look to join that arrangement.

Reduce Camden dependency on Agency Staff

The Council staff levels rise yearly and further, over 10% of employment is through agencies. The cost of this to the borough is over £2.2M per year. It cannot be good practice for this to continue unchecked.

The use of temporary staff introduces a burden on Camden through the need for continual, repetitive induction training and can also result in a lower level of corporate commitment. A happy workplace is one where everyone feels both an intrinsic part of the organisation and permanently embedded in its ethos.

The council should make greater efforts to drive down the non-productive costs of staffing by reducing the reliance on agency hiring towards a level of 5%. This reduction would deliver a £1.1M saving while not reducing overall numbers. By more use of existing technology, the council should also commit to a future 5% reduction in total staff numbers through efficiencies.

A Fairer Camden:

Reduce the rise in council tax by 50%

The continued rise in taxation should be kept to a minimum for the benefit of residents.

Proposed by: Councillor Steve Adams

Seconded by: Councillor Andrew Parkinson

The Executive Director Corporate Services confirms that, should the amendments be agreed, the assurances required by Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 with regard the adequacy of the reserves and the robustness of the estimates have been met and, therefore, that this still constitutes a balanced budget for 2025/26. The Executive Director Corporate Services or other officers have not been able to give these proposals the depth of consideration and due diligence to be able to recommend this as a course of action or to assess the financial impacts of the proposals beyond 2025/26. It has not been possible to make a full and comprehensive assessment of the impact of these proposals (such as those linked to the future use of our buildings or the impact on the existing workforce) and the associated implementation issues and risks.

It should also be noted that the full economic and social impact of both the Covid pandemic and the Cost-of-Living Crisis into 2025/26 and beyond is not yet fully known.

Summary of figures

Extra costs:

Restore weekly bin collections to 30% of the borough where the average front area is less than 8M2 per household	693,000
Make garden waste collection free of charge.	296,000
Open Regis Road refuse and recycling centre for one evening a week	20,000
Proper Control of Builders through employing 2 extra enforcement officers	117,052
Open a police or security base on the Finchley Road	130,854
Install more CCTV in crime hotspots	100,000
Make annual grants to Camden's community libraries.	50,000
Extend library opening times	622,000
Send information packs to residents when they move in.	100,000
Resume postal notifications of planning applications	59,565

Increase maturity of certain key location replacement trees	150,000
Reduce crime by employing 6 extra security officers	383,406
Halve proposed Council Tax increase	3,685,123
Total extra costs	6,407,000

Savings:

Renting out one floor of 5 Pancras Square	1,108,000
Shared Digital services, HR, Legal, Strategy and Procurement with Westminster and RBKC	3,599,000
50% of roles covered by Agency Staff to be recruited to full time employment to save on the extra cost carry over of agency staff	1,100,000
Reduce total Agency Staff by 5%	600,000
Total savings	6,407,000