

Liberal Democrat Group budget amendments

Council, 3rd March 2025

Our budget amendment seeks to tackle the neglect and failures of the Labour administration in Camden.

This is the first budget in many years without a Conservative Government. Labour, both nationally and locally, have promised much about the difference this will make. Yet once again, the funding settlement from the government is a single year settlement that gives with one hand and takes away with the other. Again, it is predicated on the maximum increase in council tax. And given inflation, the increase in employers' NI contributions and rising pressures on services, what additional funding the council has received allows us to do little more than tread water. This is true, whether we are talking about SEND provision or homelessness.

The Labour chair of London Councils recently stated about the settlement that "*massive service pressures and tight funding constraints mean that hard times are still here for boroughs' budgets.*"

Labour has run this council since 2010, run the Mayorality since 2016 (and so control the Metropolitan Police and TfL), and are now in power nationally. The Labour administration is running out of excuses for failing to address the problems affecting the people of Camden.

Despite all these levers, Labour is letting people down. Nationally, Labour has scrapped the Winter Fuel Allowance and retained the two child benefit cap. At a London level there is a failure to boost police numbers and a failure to invest in crucial transport upgrades, such as at Camden Town station. At a Camden level rough sleeping and homelessness continues to rise. Drug dealing and anti-social behaviour are blighting our communities. Residents and visitors alike continue to point to how much rubbish there is on our streets.

No doubt we will hear speeches this evening from Labour seeking to blame the problems Camden faces on the Coalition government. Some members opposite would probably blame the Lib Dems for the Fall of Troy, the Great Flood and the Chicxulub asteroid. We believe that the people of Camden would like their representatives to focus on the here and now, not on what happened over a decade ago.

This budget amendment focuses on four key areas where the Labour council is failing to meet the challenges Camden faces:

1. Homelessness and rough sleeping
2. Drug dealing, anti-social behaviour and rubbish
3. Making Camden an 'Age and Disabled Friendly Borough'
4. Tackling Climate Change

Our amendment also has a musical coda.

Homelessness and rough sleeping

Last year our budget amendment included an additional £1m in funding for Routes off the Streets and the Homelessness Prevention Team. We included this because of the rising tide of these two problems and the very high human cost they involve. The response from the Labour administration to this proposal was to claim that the level of funding they had in place was adequate to tackle these problems.

Over the last year the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased further, with a rising human cost and financial cost. Camden has the second highest number

of rough sleepers in England and the numbers continue to go up¹. At least nine homeless people died in Camden last year².

We recognise that there are many factors at work on both these fronts, but the funding we put into our teams is one factor that does have an impact and we can control.

The funding last year was not adequate. Additional funding provided by Labour is again not adequate, because the problem has got worse. This is why we are again proposing significant investment in these two teams. **We would fund five additional Routes Off the Streets outreach workers (£268,000) and ten additional Temporary Accommodation support officers (£585,000).**

We have also seen in the last year that, at last, work has begun on the two temporary accommodation hostels, at Chester Rd and Camden Rd. These were described in a report to Cabinet in July 2020³ as an 'urgent' part of the council's homelessness strategy 2019-24, with a target date for completion of June 2022. The latest completion date is 'late 2026'. This means that 89 homes are over four years behind schedule. Since 2021 the number of homeless households placed in hotels and bed & breakfasts has increased from 80 to 337⁴ and the council's overspend in this area has gone from £1 million to over £13 million⁵.

To help tackle the shortage in available accommodation, we are proposing a substantial boost to the council's Temporary Accommodation Purchasing Programme. We have said all along it is a good programme, but it must go further. Our amendment would see the council sell the under-used Crowndale Centre and use almost all of the receipts to purchase an additional 37 homes. This is in essence swapping one under-used capital asset for a collection of assets that are much needed. Not only would this help provide a greater degree of stability to vulnerable people in Camden, it will also save the council substantial costs of putting people in hotels and B&Bs, which is driving the £13 million overspend. **We would fund the purchase of an additional 37 homes as part of the council's Temporary Accommodation Purchasing Programme (£18,500,000).**

Drug dealing, ASB and rubbish on Camden's streets

The last year has seen an unprecedented increase in drug dealing across Camden, including residential areas that are usually largely free from this blight. With this has come an inevitable increase in other crime and anti-social behaviour. This impacts on all residents of our borough and is of particular concern to parents. The failure of the Labour Mayor of London to recruit more police officers undermines the council's ability to act.

¹ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

² <https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/homeless-death-epidemic-takes-nine-lives-in%E2%80%88camden>

³ <https://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s89897/Building%20New%20Temporary%20Accommodation.pdf>

⁴ Council MEM16017

⁵ <https://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/b31598/Written%20Council%20Questions%2020th-Jan-2025%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=9>

Alongside this is the Labour administration's failure to tackle rubbish and fly-tipping on our streets, leading to a general sense of neglect across the borough. A recent DEFRA report⁶ placed Camden as the second worst borough in London for fly-tipping.

The reorganisation of the Community Safety Enforcement Teams, to include statutory powers on environmental crime is welcome but is inadequate for the scale of the challenges across these areas. Camden needs, at least for the time being, more Community Safety Officers, a larger enforcement team and a greater focus on education, to supplement enforcement. The council must also ensure that high-quality mobile CCTV units are always available whenever they can be put to good use.

We would fund:

- **Ten additional Community Safety Enforcement Officers, taking the team to 30 officers (£806,000 revenue, £60,000 capital)**
- **Five additional Community Safety Officers, increasing that team to 15 officers, plus two additional Anti-social Behaviour Officers (£557,000)**
- **Eighteen additional Rapid Deployment CCTV units (£159,000 capital, £14,000 revenue)**
- **Five 'Environmental Education Officers' to continue and expand the good work done by the existing Education and Enforcement officers funded by CIL (£320,000)**

Making Camden an 'Age and Disabled Friendly Borough'

Last month the council passed a motion committing it to "*making Camden a friendly and accessible Borough, building on the World Health Organisation Age-Friendly Communities approach*". This amendment seeks to follow up the commitments we made.

The council should develop an action plan to make Camden an 'Age and Disabled Friendly Borough', identifying the steps the council can take to meet the specific commitments made in the motion, such as around community assets like post offices, banks, small shops and High Streets, as well as working with supermarkets to ensure there are always staffed check outs. **We would fund an officer team to develop this plan (£129,000).**

Our amendment also has a focus on the provision of public lavatories. Anxiety about the availability of these facilities can deter people from leaving home, thus contributing to loneliness and isolation. **We would fund a team to review the state of Camden's current provision and to explore ways it can be expanded (£103,000). In the future we would look to use capital investment to follow up on this work.**

The decision to scrap visitor parking scratch cards was a mistake. It will undoubtedly make life harder for vulnerable people in Camden, while failing to make any impact on carbon emissions. **We would restore visitor parking scratch cards (£36,000)**

⁶ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/croydon-fly-tipping-defra-data-borough-breakdown-b1213448.html>

Tackling Climate Change

Last year we proposed a substantial capital boost to the council's retrofit programme by selling the Crowndale Centre. In December the Labour administration decided to cover this area of work through the sale of a different type of asset – council homes.

As with last year, while we recognise that the council is taking a range of steps to meet the challenge of Climate Change, we believe there is scope to go further.

We repeat our call to improve engagement with residents on the practical steps they can take to reduce their carbon footprints. Whether it is guidance on retrofitting homes, advice on reducing food waste or efforts to improve recycling, this council needs to do better.

Camden's recycling rates remain stagnant⁷ and worse than many other London boroughs. Hearing from residents about the barriers that prevent them from recycling more, would be a smart move. **We would fund five officers to work across the borough, working with existing voluntary sector and other local organisations where appropriate, to engage with residents about steps they can take to tackle the climate emergency (£320,000)**

Trees on the streets of Camden provide many environmental benefits. In recent years we have made budget proposals to increase the number of new trees that should be planted in Camden. These proposals were met with excuses about the practical challenges that planting trees involve. We therefore welcome the analysis work the council has recently completed, that will make it easier for the number of new trees planted to be increased. The Planting Strategy aims for 250 new trees every year. Our proposals would almost double that number. **We would fund the planting of 245 extra new trees (£278,000)**

In November of last year, the Children Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee heard a deputation about the environmental impact of school uniforms, which are generally made from polyester. The evidence is clear that uniforms tend to have a substantial carbon footprint and also have significant negative health impacts due to microplastics, that get into the air our children breath. Sustainable fashion is a growing area, which is of interest to many, particularly younger, residents.

Working with partners, such as Central St. Martins, to run a borough-wide competition for Camden Secondary Schools re-imagining school uniforms as fit of the 21st century could help stimulate solutions to reduce the environmental impact of school uniforms, while keeping costs down. **We would fund such a competition (£10,000).**

Working with schools to upskill parents and school children to repair existing clothes could also help reduce costs and keep the carbon footprint of having school uniforms down, as well as being a useful life skill. **We would fund a training programme open to parents and children (£7,000).**

Musical education in schools

Last year, we proposed a pilot of the Every Child a Musician Scheme, which was rejected by the Labour administration. We remain committed to building on the good work that already happens in Camden schools and hope that one day every child in Camden will benefit from free musical instrument tuition. **To help this happen we would fund two music teachers to work across schools in Camden, support classroom teachers who are not music**

⁷ <https://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/b31598/Written%20Council%20Questions%2020th-Jan-2025%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=9>

specialists and collaborate with Camden Music Service on the strategic development of music education in schools throughout the borough (£148,000). We would also fund a store of musical instruments these teachers could draw on (£3,000 capital)

Funding

We would make the most of 5PS by renting out space at 5PS to provide much needed additional revenue. Officers have made it clear that one floor could be rented out without any impact on staff working patterns. This means that over £1m a year of revenue has been left unused, yet again. **We would rent out 2 floors of the main floors (not the lobby or floor 11 or 12) of the Council's offices at 5 Pancras Square, raising £2,216,000.**

We also propose selling the Crowndale Centre to provide capital and to free up revenue costs. This can be done in a way that retains the library on site. **Doing it this way would provide £19,000,000 in capital and free up £1,087,000 in revenue.**

5PS and the Crowndale Centre are underused assets. This is the fourth year in a row we have proposed using these buildings and each year the Labour administration has made excuses about the practical challenges of doing so, but these could have been overcome long ago. Given the great pressures on the council's finances, it is lazy and complacent not to make better use of the opportunities these buildings present.

Proposed by: Councillor Tom Simon

Seconded by: Councillor Judy Dixey