

ANNEXE C3 – OPPOSITION GROUP BUDGET RESPONSES

Extracted from on-line budget consultation responses:

This is a response on behalf of the Conservative Group. Overall the budget is good. We understand the need to increase the Council Tax by the maximum allowable given the additional pressures. However, we do question a few of the savings, namely:

Street Lighting - p18 A 10% blanket dimming is not acceptable. Any dimming needs to be restricted to hours where it will have the least effect on residents. We need to ensure that the light levels are high enough to maintain safety.

Grounds Maintenance - p19 - Residential verge cuts Reducing the cut frequency to every 4 - 6 weeks is folly. In that time grass can grow to waist height. This will reduce sight lines for traffic at junctions. It will also lead to a significant increase in complaints about how untidy the borough looks.

Grounds Maintenance - p19 - Litter bin reduction. It would be useful to see some empirical data on the use of the waste bins to back this up. Most humans are inherently lazy and will not go searching for a litter bin. Many will just discard the litter if there is no bin in the immediate vicinity. This will just lead to an increase in the overall level of litter in the borough.

Libraries - P20 - Home library service This is a lifeline for many of our most vulnerable residents who are housebound. Cutting this service will lead to an increase in both physical and mental health issues. It would be useful to know how many residents this will affect. If the intention is to have the Home Library service run by the voluntary sector, then strongly suggest that we do not include figures for savings until such a time as we know that this change is committed.

In addition to the above, we would request that a one off contribution of £20k be included in the budget to fund purchase of CCTV for fly tipping enforcement as an invest to save.

Councillor Temperton
Leader, Bracknell Forest Council

Dear Mary

CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2024-25: VIEWS OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP

The Liberal Democrat Group is publishing this response to the Executive's consultation on the draft budget for 2024-25.

We agree with your public statements that setting the Council's budget for 2024-25 is hugely challenging and involves some difficult choices. Whilst none of us would like to see any reduction in services provided for the benefit of people who live and work in our borough, or to have any increases in Council Tax and other charges on residents, this is the harsh reality facing this council and others. In accepting the collective responsibility on all councillors to adopt a budget, we therefore wish to be as supportive as possible to the Executive during the budget-setting process, consistent with our duty to residents and our values as Liberal Democrats.

We are supportive of the broad thrust and direction of the draft budget. We particularly welcome the proposal in the Capital Programme budget to significantly increase the expenditure on highways maintenance by £2 million in 2024/25, reducing to £1 million in each year following. At our Ward surgeries and elsewhere, residents frequently tell us of their concerns over the scourge of potholes. We can see that some good progress has been achieved on this in recent months, and it is vital that this work should continue, not least because of the risk of compensation claims against the council, and for the avoidance of much more expensive repairs in the future. *A stitch in time really does save nine.*

We are opposed to the following two proposals in the draft budget, and we urge the Executive to reconsider them.

Proposed reduction in litter bins

We consider that the proposal to halve the number of litter bins (from the current 900 bins) is ill-judged and counter-productive. The cumulative effect of this proposal, along with the proposed reductions in street cleaning, weeding and verge cutting, would impact very negatively on the physical appearance of our Borough and the whole street scene. It would almost certainly lead to an increase in littering, requiring more expenditure on street cleaning, and possibly create health hazards. These very negative impacts cannot be justified by a projected saving of only £30,000.

Charging for Staff Car parking

Officers have endured annual pay rises lower than inflation for some years, and we should be careful to keep up their morale and not add to their cost-of-living pressures. The small amount of income generated by the proposed introduction of staff car parking charges (£50,000) would, in our view, have a disproportionately damaging

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effect on officer morale. We are particularly strongly opposed to the introduction of car park charges for lower paid staff, also the very divisive effect of charging at Time Square and Braccan Walk, but not at other locations where officers are based.

Affordability

We appreciate that our suggestions above would put a - relatively small – pressure on the draft budget. We suggest that this might be afforded by two means:

- A reduction in BFC Councillor’s allowances (for both the standard allowance and for special responsibilities), perhaps to the average of the other Unitary Authorities in Berkshire. We consider it anomalous that the former Conservative administration chose to adopt the highest level of councillor allowances in Berkshire.
- The Executive should explore the potential for more shared services/partnership arrangements with other local authorities, to achieve more efficiency savings. These have been found to work well in some areas.

We hope that the Executive can accede to our requests, when putting forward the final draft budget for the full Council’s approval. I and my colleagues would be happy to meet to discuss them with you, if that would be helpful.

I should add that individual Liberal Democrat councillors will probably be raising other issues during the discussions on the draft budget by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and its O&S Panels.

We would like to close by commending the Executive’s active engagement with residents during the period of compiling the budget. This has been a big improvement on previous practice, and we were pleased that Liberal Democrat councillors were involved in some of your meetings with residents.

Kind regards

Signed Electronically

Councillor Mike Forster

Leader, Local Democrat Group

11 January 2024

Copy – Susan Halliwell, Chief Executive