

Salford Council 2010/11

Budget Overview



Labour's budget represents cuts: cuts in services and cuts in jobs (up to 170 over the next three years).

The 0% council tax rise (not including police and fire authority precepts – likely to raise it to .75%) is as welcome as it is overdue. Unfortunately Labour have decided to pay for this electioneering budget by cutting services and increasing costs from everyone from elderly residents, to grieving families, library users, charities, businesses and schools.

Increases in prices (for library services, meals on wheels, funeral administration and bereavement services, and increases in costs for cash strapped schools) are labelled by Labour as 'savings' or 'efficiencies'. Labour are trying to pull the wool over everyone's eyes and they've left the detail of these cuts out of the budget papers.

Labour have earmarked up to £6m of capital receipts (buildings and land) in order to pay for the debt they're building up, but refuse to reveal which bits of the family silver they plan to sell off.

The bill of over £25m for capital financing (financing debt or paying interest on borrowings) is now bigger than the budget of three of the council's directorates. The capital financing budget cost this year is greater than the combined budgets for the Environment and Chief Executive directorates.

Labour will introduce increases in prices for **meals on wheels, bereavement services** and **funeral administration**. At a time of economic hardship and misery for many, the council should not be making things worse for those least able to afford it, or those suffering the most. The Liberal Democrats propose ditching these 'savings'.

Labour is unable to reduce the schools budget because it would be politically unpopular and because that budget has now been ring fenced by the government. However, to get round this they are increasing a range of charges that schools have little or no choice over paying. At the same time the

government grant increase has reduced substantially, other costs for schools are rising, and they are being asked by government to make cuts. Dozens of Salford's schools already operate a deficit, which now totals millions of pounds of debt. Schools should not be facing more costs from the council – the Liberal Democrats would scrap Labour's cuts.

Instead of cuts to services, we are slashing Labour's marketing budget; scrapping unnecessary allowances paid to councillors; reducing money spent on consultants and mobile phones; and finding other savings. By cutting wasteful marketing and spin, we would be able to maintain the 0% tax raise without the harmful effects that Labour's budget will bring.

The money we plan on saving is targeted at areas of concern raised by residents:

- Reducing waiting times for elderly and disabled residents waiting for housing adaptations. Liberal Democrat councillors have faced casework where people who are supposedly at the top of the waiting list for things like ramps or walk-in showers have to wait up to a year and a half for their essential needs to be met.
- Increase in budget to fund improvements to youth services such as through the improvement of facilities or by taking on additional youth workers.
- Increase in devolved funding, targeted at highways, and footpath and road safety for local residents to spend on their priorities through Community Committees. Because we believe in local democracy – we propose giving residents a far greater direct say over how their council tax is spent.
- Increasing of funds directed toward street cleansing, park wardens/ranger service, and public toilets. Increase in funding for measures to tackle extreme weather – gritting, road clearance etc.
- Increase in funding to be directed at supporting town centres, and on Community Safety initiatives such as target hardening; tackling off-road bike nuisance; CCTV etc.

The Liberal Democrat group of councillors have targeted resources and fought Labour's cuts and price hikes based on key principles of fairness:

A fair start for all our children – fighting Labour's price hikes on schools.

A fair future: a rebalanced, green economy – fighting to preserve local jobs and businesses and reduce our carbon emissions.

A fair deal from politicians – ending the political gravy train and ensuring that local politics is open and transparent.

Sadly the way government funds local councils makes council reliant upon central government and removes a great deal of control from councils over how it responds to the needs of residents. A Liberal Democrat government would scrap the unfair council tax and replace it with a fair system of local taxation.

Lib Dem Group – specific proposals

Directorate Budgets

Chief Executive

Reduction in budget of £300k to be achieved by: reduction of expenditure on Life in Salford magazine; cancelling of loss-making ice rink (£143k); scaling back of expenditure on events such as Garden Party and Proms in the Park; cessation of marketing activities such as attendance at political party conferences; reduction of expenditure on external design agencies.

In future such events would have to convince scrutiny committees of their business case or pressing public need. Such huge losses as we have seen are unacceptable in a time of massive economic hardship, and the events themselves would have made even larger demands upon the revenue account were it not for sponsorship money from other public bodies. Such a disregard for the public purse is unacceptable to the opposition groups, and it is unacceptable to the people of Salford.

Community Health and Social Care

Increase in budget targeted at reducing waiting times for housing adaptations for the elderly and disabled. +£50K

Children's Services

Increase in budget to fund improvements to youth services such as through the improvement of facilities or by taking on additional youth workers. +£100K

Customer and Support Services

Increase in devolved funding, targeted at highways, and footpath and road safety to be partially funded by removing executive support member allowances (subject to constitutional amendment) and virement of efficiency saving CHSC11. +£150k

Environment

Increasing of funds directed toward street cleansing, park wardens/ranger service, and public toilets. Increase in funding for measures to tackle extreme weather – gritting, road clearance etc. +£200k

Sustainable Regeneration

Increase in funding to be directed at supporting town centres, and on Community Safety initiatives such as target hardening; tackling off-road bike nuisance; CCTV etc. +£100k

Efficiencies & Savings.

The Liberal Democrats maintain the view that Labour's efficiencies programme contains a huge number of proposals which are neither efficiencies nor savings. For example: increase in revenue from more citizenship ceremonies; increase in charges for library services, funerals and meals on wheels; cutting of subsidy to Lledr Hall; removal of domestic care arrangements. Many of the so called 'efficiency savings' refer to cuts in services and hikes in prices.

In a time of hardship for the people of Salford there are many of these efficiencies, which will affect those with the greatest need, or those in times of extreme hardship, the most. Therefore we would remove or amend the following efficiency savings proposals for 2010/11:

CS5 - Increased Charges

The 2% increase in charge for Children's Services relates to increase Service Level Agreement (SLA) costs to schools or parents for caretaking, extra-curricular music activities; and training room hire. In addition this increase will also increase costs for other council directorates. -£30k

CHSC11 - Reduction in revenue expenditure budgets with Community Services

The reduction of 10k to Neighbourhood Management Teams reflects an under spend by those teams in the past. Rather than claw it back to the central revenue budget the Liberal Democrats would instead transfer the funds into the devolved budget for community committees to help mitigate against likely reduction in devolved budgets from partner organisations. -£10k

CHSC14 - 2% increase in charge for services

Part of this proposal includes an increase in charges for Adult Social Care meals (meals on wheels) and funeral administration. Local citizens have had enough hardship heaped upon them by Labour: the Liberal Democrat group would freeze these costs at current levels for the next financial year. -£5800

F3 (part 2) Increase SLA to schools and DSG-funded services £20k

School budgets are currently extremely tight. The Lib Dem group do not believe that now is a good time to compromise the education of our children as part of a cost cutting measure and so we are opposed to increases in charges that will raise school costs. Of this proposal we would retain only the additional charge to the insurance fund in respect of overheads related to the management of insurance issues for schools, which is not an additional charge on schools (£5k). -£15k

H2 Increase in Income - School SLA

An increase of at least £1000 per school for HR costs is yet another blow to our beleaguered education sector. -£97k

ES5 - Environment - Increase in Income

£28k of this £107k is from increased charges by bereavement services. The Lib Dem group believes that there is scope within the budget to avoid this charge in the next financial year. -£28k

Additional Cross Cutting

The Lib Dem group believes that, given the expenditure in previous years, a saving of £100,000 in the use of consultants is both achievable and

conservative. In addition we believe that a reduction expenditure on mobile phones of 1% based upon the 2008 figure of nearly £400,000 is achievable.
+£104,000

Additional Customer and Support Services

Savings to be found by making greater use of open source software and rationalisation of IT hardware provision. +£50k.