

## Budget Amendments 6 March 2024 – Liberal Democrat Group

### **Amendment 1: Working to build a sustainable community**

That after Recommendation 5, new Recommendations 6 and 7 be added:

6. Noting both the real terms cut in school spending power because of inflation as well as feedback from teachers and governors about increased pressures on schools' budgets, and as such requests Cabinet, at the first available opportunity, to consider ways in which schools can be further supported to manage these budget difficulties, especially in the short term. This could be funded on a one-off basis by up to £300k from the *For use in future years' budgets* reserve. Cabinet is also requested to consider other ways of supporting schools including use of the Capital Programme to make improvements that reduce energy use (and therefore also help to contribute to achieving net zero by 2030).

7. To request that the Cabinet better align its parking permit charging structure with their stated aims to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality, by considering:

i) moving from the permit pricing structure adopted in 2020 that results in much higher charges in Wimbledon and Raynes Park to a borough-wide standard permit charge.

This would enable the charge to be based on carbon emission and air quality considerations rather than purely geographical ones - which are divisive;

ii) evaluating the affordability and lawfulness of offering rebates for parking permits for those residents in receipt of Council Tax Support;

iii) the implementation of a low mileage/low use rebate for residents' parking permits, on the basis that it is not the ownership of a vehicle but the extent of its use that increases carbon emissions and threatens air quality. This would incentivise driving less, and would help to mitigate the impact of higher parking costs for those on low/fixed incomes who cannot afford to switch to newer and more environmentally friendly vehicles;

iv) whether other variables would also be appropriate when determining discounts to standard charges - such as vehicle weight and length. This could incentivise residents to use smaller vehicles that are safer in a dense urban environment; and

v) exempting ULEZ compliant diesel vehicles from the flat rate diesel levy.

## **Amendment 2: Action on cost of living emergency: two-child benefit cap**

That after Recommendation 5, add new Recommendation 6

6. Noting particularly the Council's commitments to mitigate child poverty, requests that Cabinet consider bringing forward proposals to Full Council on providing discretionary payments to those residents affected by the two-child benefit cap from its cost of living fund. This is to be funded by up to £400k on a one-off basis from the "For use in future year's budget" reserve or another appropriate reserve, with a request to examine ways to fund this element in future years. This purpose could also be the first call on funding if there is an underspend in the General Fund at the financial end of 2024/25 subject to audit.

## **Amendment 3: Action on cost of living emergency: a compassionate Council**

That after Recommendation 1, new Recommendations 1A-1B be added:

1A. As adjusted to reduce the pressure on the budgets for the Adult Social Care department, additional funding of £300k is proposed on a one-off basis from the For use in future years' budgets reserve, with attempts made to increase this budget across the Medium Term Financial Strategy including through a focus on the realignment of recurrent budget underspends and tighter budget control.

1B. As adjusted by deleting the previously agreed saving from CS02 Introducing Charges for Blue Badges (£15k) to abolish these charges; by extending library opening hours for those libraries currently closed midweek (£42k); and by opening the paddling pools at Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields, King Georges Playing Fields, Colliers Wood, Rowan Rec, Joseph Hood Rec and Morden Park from 17 June 2024 (ie a month earlier than current plans) (£43k). These to be funded by the deletion of growth proposal 2024-25 FDG1 (an additional director post).

## **Amendment 4: Merton as a custodian**

That after Recommendation 5, new Recommendation 6 be added:

6. The Council encourages the Cabinet to consider reviewing the efficacy of the process of budget scrutiny of the schemes in the Capital Programme and the monitoring of their delivery by considering:

- i) whether an explanation of how the Capital Programme reflects the priorities of the Cabinet can be included in budget scrutiny information;
- ii) the extent to which the information available to councillors involved in the budget scrutiny process could be improved so that they can have a proper appreciation of the rationales for the schemes in the Capital Programme;
- iii) advising the Overview and Scrutiny Commission of any substantial delays (for example a year) to and/or material overspends (for example +10%) on the major schemes (for example of total value above £1m) within the Capital Programme.

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