

An

# **Alternative Budget Proposal**

for

## **Bristol City Council 2012/13**

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Councillors on Bristol City Council



[www.bristolgreenparty.org.uk](http://www.bristolgreenparty.org.uk)

# Introduction: Another way is possible



The national Conservative/Lib Dem government is committed to a programme of radically cutting public spending. Labour are no different, their economic plans include cuts of an almost identical size.

We Greens do not accept the flawed economic arguments that these cuts are necessary. The UK deficit is not particularly high by historic standards and cutting now only further weakens the economy.

There is no guarantee that the private sector will be able to take up the slack in jobs lost to the public sector, and indeed private businesses are likely to suffer from reduced public contracts and the lower spending by a smaller public sector workforce. Valuable public services should not be cut to bail out the banks and sustain financial markets.

Debt does need to be lowered in the long term but this requires a radical new approach to economics and will not be achieved whilst maintaining the conventional approach and cutting expenditure.

We believe Government revenue should be increased by introducing financial transaction taxes, assigning resources into tackling the widespread crime of tax evasion, and by tightening up the loopholes, which allow legal, but amoral, tax avoidance. Both tax evasion and avoidance are usually committed by those who have the most.

One cut we would like to see is of the Trident nuclear weapons system, which is hugely expensive and wholly unnecessary. Much of current defence spending is only of use in waging offensive wars rather than providing an effective defence of this country.

Despite this, we acknowledge that local councils need to operate within the law and therefore need to set a budget.

The following budget proposals are intended to show the direction that Bristol Green Party would take if we were in position to control Bristol City Council. The main impact of these changes would not be felt until next year, 2013/14 though we do generate additional income and savings to reduce the impact of the cuts proposed by the Lib Dems.

This document is not intended to be a complete alternative budget. It shows the kind of new thinking that Bristol Green Party would bring to running Bristol.

**Cllr Tess Green**  
Leader of the Green Party for BCC

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# Raising Money

## Where Bristol's income comes from: Taxes and Fees

At the moment just under half Bristol City Council's (BCC) income comes from council tax with most of the balance coming from the National Non Domestic Rates (Business Rates) with virtually all the rest from the Rate Support Grant. Business Rates are collected by BCC but paid into a national pool before being redistributed back to councils. Therefore BCC would not necessarily benefit if these rates were increased. The Rate Support Grant is also out of the control of BCC.

This means the only way that BCC can increase its income is to raise council tax and other sundry fees charged for parking, etc.

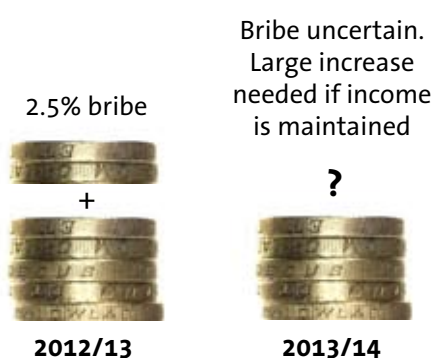
## National Government Bribe: Our response

Although central government has been cutting the money available to local authorities they have not wanted the political consequences of councils increasing council tax. Therefore they have made a series of bribes to councils to freeze the tax. This year that bribe is worth approximately 2.5% of BCC's council tax income. This amounts to 1.23% of BCC's total income.

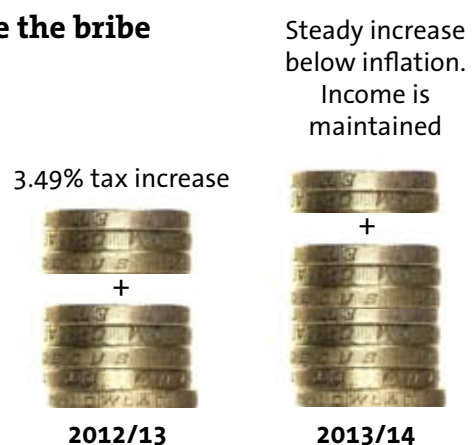
If the BCC opts to take the bribe, as proposed by the Lib Dems, it will be taking a single payment in exchange for an indefinite stream of income. Next year's income from council tax would be frozen at the same level as this year and there is no guarantee that the bribe will be available again. Taking the bribe cannot be the right thing to do unless you adopt a very term short perspective.

We believe it is right to ignore the bribe and increase council tax by 3.49% now thereby raising an additional £1.8 million in revenue this year and £6.3 million next year.

### Take the bribe



### Ignore the bribe



If the bribe is accepted and no further bribe is offered next year BCC would have to make a much larger increase in council tax next year if income is to be maintained and further cuts avoided. We understand that these are difficult economic times but we feel a steady, below inflation, increase in council tax this year is preferable to a huge jump next year. It is clear that council tax is an imperfect system, but it's one of the few options councils have to increase income. The poorest don't pay council tax, and the better off with larger homes pay more.

Increasing council tax in order to protect frontline services will allow revenues to be raised proportionally across the city as opposed to cutting those services which will inevitably have a greater negative impact on the poorest and most vulnerable of our fellow Bristolians.

# Raising Money (continued)

The greatest burden on the ability of the city of Bristol to effectively manage its budget is the lack of local revenue raising powers and a lack of control over key areas affecting its socio-economic performance. The series of bribes offered by central government has reduced the proportion of BCCs income generated through council tax and therefore increased its dependence on incentives and schemes offered by central government, This in turn has meant that local policies initiated in Bristol for the benefit of the city have been more difficult to introduce. Rejecting the bribe and increasing council tax is the beginning of the fight to get more local control.

## **Parking**

We believe a review of parking costs in the city is overdue. Many parks including both Blaise Estate and Ashton Court offer free parking. These parks are not only used by Bristolians, others who drive there are not from the city. The Lib Dems have proposed to introduce a charge of £1 to park at Ashton Court. We would extend this to include Blaise Estate. This is expected to generate an extra £90,000 pa. We suggest that that blue badge disabled drivers do not pay this charge.

Consideration should be given to the introduction of residents parking schemes in the immediate vicinity of these parks. This is to ensure that the neighbouring residential streets do not become free car parks for park users.

## **Workplace Parking Levy**

Bristol's transport infrastructure needs substantial investment. It seems unlikely that significant funds are going to be available from central government for sensible transport plans for the foreseeable future.

We would begin the process of introducing a Workplace Parking Levy, This involves a detailed consultation process and agreement from the Secretary of State, so could not begin before April 2016. There are 13,000 parking spaces in the city, at £300 pa these would produce revenue of £3.5m pa, after the cost of running the scheme is deducted.

Income produced from this scheme would be ring fenced to tackle Bristol's chronic transport infrastructure problem by developing the existing rail network, improving bus services and, just as importantly, promoting safe cycling and walking.

# Expenditure Savings

Another way to find money in a tight budget is to reduce expenditure. While the Greens oppose cuts to front line services, there are a number of wasteful expenditure schemes being proposed by Lib Dem budget for 2012/13, which should be removed.

## **Bus Rapid Transport**

Our policy is to cancel the South Bristol Link and Ashton Vale Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) schemes confirmed in the Chancellor's autumn statement. Proponents of these schemes focus on the £100m payment from central government but overlook the cost to the city, which is a staggering £30m. This is money that could be spent far more effectively elsewhere.

## **Information Communications and Technology (ICT)**

This has a huge budget of £16.8m – even after projected savings of £0.5m. This represents 4.5% of total BCC spending. Our understanding is that the council has relatively recently decided to enter into a contract to use Microsoft products. This inevitably leads to the payment of licensing fees for software. We believe utilising open source software could make significant savings. This would require more software engineers being employed by the council but the cost of this would be more than offset by savings in licensing fees, resulting in a reduced overall spend. Furthermore, money that would otherwise be exported to Microsoft and their shareholders would remain in the local economy providing jobs to support families.

## **Cars**

We believe that councils should be leading the way in reducing reliance on cars, which are so detrimental to the environment. At present the pool car and car hire budget is an astounding £6.5 million even after savings proposed by the Lib Dems. We believe that by placing greater emphasis on public transport, car sharing, and videoconferencing, further savings could be made. In addition we propose a thorough review of the use of vehicles

We would also investigate the use of electric vehicles within the city. The short nature of many of the journeys undertaken on behalf of BCC makes these vehicles a viable option.

# Summary of Revenue Raising

## Budget addition funds available 2012/13

<b>Item</b>	<b>£</b>
Council tax	1,800,000
Parking	90,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,890,000</b>

## Budget addition funds available 2013/14

<b>Item</b>	<b>£</b>
Council tax	6,300,000
Parking	110,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,410,000</b>

# Spending to Protect Services

The following proposals are for allocation of the additional revenue raised for 2012/13.

## **Youth Services**

In the Green Party we believe that public services should be provided by public employees, We are appalled to see that the Lib Dems propose a cut of £1,000,000 to the budget of this department. We think that this is a deeply insensitive move when youth unemployment is at record levels and we have seen civil unrest on our streets.

We would spend £880,000 to provide means tested free transport for 16 – 18 year old students. Many young people travel to the schools and 6th form colleges by bus and the current fares are too high. We would love to make travel free for all those under 18 as it is in London but there are not enough funds to do this. Targeting in this way means that about one quarter of those in this age group and in education will benefit. Many believe that travel habits start young and by encouraging students to travel by bus you are influencing their travel decisions for life.

We would allocate £245,000 to the protection of existing youth facilities. This money would go some way towards undoing the inevitable harm caused by the cut

£130,000 would be transferred to a Future Jobs Fund to replace the scheme axed by the coalition government. This would provide jobs and training for young people at this crucial point in their lives.

We are particularly keen to see children brought into direct contact with the environment and nature, something that many of us take for granted but is denied to many children growing up in our city. Money spent in this area brings benefits to physical and mental health as well as to enhancing the green spaces in our city.

£450,000 would be invested in building, running and maintaining two new adventure playgrounds similar to those in St Pauls, Lockleaze and Southmead.

## **Health and Social Care**

We are very wary of cuts in this area that supplies services to many of the most needy members of our community. We are not against changes that make delivery of services more efficient but we are suspicious when services previously provided by directly employed staff are replaced with those provided by private companies.

We are in favour of personalised budgets but we do not see this as a cheap option. It is vital that the right support is given to people as the system changes.

We would also like to see much better community use of Health and Social care assets such as buildings. This would help destigmatise the vulnerable users of these services and provide much needed community space.

We also feel that more work could be done with businesses to find real jobs for disabled people.

# Spending to Protect Services (continued)

## Transport

Every Bristolian knows that we suffer from a dreadful public transport system. Over reliance on the car is in a large part caused by expensive infrequent buses that do not always go where you want them to go. On top of this there is the lack of an integrated ticketing system. We would use £90,000 to improve the evening & weekend service on the line between Avonmouth & Temple Meads Stations, creating a 40 minute interval, Monday to Friday 0600 - 0000 timetable in both directions. We believe that this small improvement could be the start of making much more use of the existing rail network within the city.

## Voluntary and Community Sector

It is vital that we support the voluntary and community sectors (VCS), many organisations are losing funding and finding it difficult to raise money from other sources. We do not think that this is an appropriate time for council to be cutting its budget in this area and therefore we would allocate £70,000 to replace the Lib Dems proposed cut.

**The Well:** We would allocate £60,000 to The Well, which is a supported housing project for vulnerable women who are looking to leave the sex industry.

**Malcolm X Centre:** The Malcolm X Centre is a well used facility that has had part of its funding withdrawn. We would reinstate this with a grant of £35,000 though part of this would need to be spent on management training to ensure that standards required of an organisation in receipt of public funding can continue to be met.

## Budget allocation of addition funds available 2012/13

Item	£
Maintaining Existing Youth facilities	245,000
Adventure Playgrounds	450,000
Future Jobs Fund	130,000
Parson St to Avonmouth rail services	90,000
Bus Passes for young people	880,000
The Well	60,000
The Malcolm X Centre	35,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,890,000</b>

# Summary

## **There is an alternative**

Bristol Green Party's budget proposals demonstrate that we do not have to put up with the cuts as proposed. There is an alternative, but it requires political leadership that does not fear standing up to Westminster and imposing tax increases, that will largely fall on the better off within Bristol, in order to protect services that will either contribute to the life of the city as a whole, or be delivered to those in need.

This proposal has taken a two year view delivering some extra revenue this year but most of the impact will not be felt until next year when we benefit from the expanded income base delivered by the increase in council tax. Too often the short term view is taken and difficult decisions that may be unpopular with some parts of the electorate are avoided. This is at the long term expense of the financial health of our city.

This document was first published on 31st January by the Green Group of Councillors on Bristol City Council.

For more information about Bristol Green Party economic policy, and our budget proposals, please contact [gus.hoyt@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:gus.hoyt@bristol.gov.uk) or [tess.green@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:tess.green@bristol.gov.uk)



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