

Bristol Green Party guide to completing the Council consultations

This summer the Council has several consultations running about proposed cuts to services including **libraries, public toilets**, services for people with **learning disabilities and mental ill health**, **Neighbourhood Partnerships**, and **council tax relief for the very poorest households** in the city.

It is vital that as many people as possible complete these consultations to show the Mayor how they feel, and explain what they would like to see instead. **The consultations close 5th September.**

Consultation responses are most powerful when personalised, so we are not providing a word-by-word script, but we hope the following tips will be helpful.

- **‘None of the above’ is a valid answer!** Many questions consist of a multiple-choice followed by a free-text box for comments. It is not necessary to choose any of the options being offered, and if you don’t agree with any of them, you can make this clear by using the comment box to say ‘None of the above’, before adding any other comments you would like to make.
- **Points you could make about some/all of these proposals:**
 - Explain why it is a false economy to cut it (many of the services are preventative – and cutting them will cost the Council more in the long run as they would cause homelessness, hospitalisation, and increased reliance on other services.)
 - That most of these cuts would impact on the most vulnerable in society – the elderly, disabled, homeless, those with learning disabilities, mental or physical ill health, those who cannot afford to buy books or have internet at home.
 - Describe the value of the service to you personally, or people you know.
 - Any ideas you have for alternatives to the cut.
 - Highlight that alternatives were proposed by the Green Party councillors at the annual budget meeting in February 2017, but were voted down by the Labour administration. Ask why these cannot be considered. Details here: <https://bristolgreenparty.org.uk/news/bristol-greens-identify-additional-17m-to-save-vital-council-services>
And here: <https://bristolgreenparty.org.uk/news/labour-whipped-to-vote-down-all-budget-suggestions-from-other-political-parties>
 - Highlight that there are hints from Number 10 that Theresa May could be retreating from austerity, so efforts of the Labour administration should be focussed on pushing for the rolling back of austerity, not obediently carrying out the government’s cuts. Details here: <https://bristolgreenparty.org.uk/news/green-group-leader-if-youre-not-happy-with-council-cuts-tell-the-labour-administration>

(Note: Marvin Rees' recent pledge to go to London to "call for an end to cuts to local council funding" is misleading – he is co-presenting a paper from the 10 Core Cities calling for increased devolution and investment in infrastructure projects. It mentions nothing about stopping or reversing cuts to services:

https://www.corecities.com/sites/default/files/field/attachment/91115_Core%20Cities%20Green%20Report_WEB.pdf)

- **Need some assistance using the online consultation form?** You might find [Councillor Clive Stevens' detailed 'how to' guide \(click here\)](#) helpful.

Specific guidance on each consultation

The following points are the views of a working group who prepared this guide, which consists of a handful of Green councillors and BGP reps, but they are not exhaustive. **Feel free to use some of the points below**, alongside **the general points above**, and any additional ideas of your own, but **please use your own words**.

'Neighbourhood' Consultation and 'Supporting People' budgets Consultation:

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-spending-performance/your-neighbourhood-consultation-2017>

Bristol Community Links

- Closing the three Community Links centres for people with complex needs and expecting Independent Living Support to replace them is an unrealistic option for many in this group. If, as suggested, these people attend Drop In centres funding must be provided to properly equip and staff these centres to support complex needs.
- A day centre for people with mild and moderate dementia is an excellent idea but one centre for all Bristol is totally inadequate.
- **The withdrawal of services for people with more complex learning disabilities is unacceptable without evidence that other providers are adequately resourced and willing and able to pick this up.**
- The proposal to maintain three Drop In centres for people with learning disabilities is positive. However, if these centres are to extend their remit to include people with sensory impairments and/or physical disabilities there needs to be a commitment to additional space, funding and staff training, including the provision of staff proficient in BSL and knowledgeable re physical disabilities.
- **The proposal to stop universal transport to centres means that cost of transport will fall on users, most of whom will not be able to use public transport. This is a double whammy for these people given government reductions to mobility allowances.** There is no commitment to meet transport costs of those who have no possibility of funding from elsewhere.

Libraries

- The consultation is not fit for purpose as the options are too limited; it does not invite creative ways to maintain the service. Can you suggest ways of increasing income streams, reducing overheads, co-locating libraries with other Council services to maximise use of the facilities for the community?

- Closing libraries is short-sighted. The Mayor is the custodian of the City's assets and **selling buildings for short term gain will damage the City in the long term. Monies earned from selling assets goes into the Capital budget and cannot be used to lessen the deficit in the Revenue budget.**

Public toilets

- Public toilets don't necessarily need to be Council-provided (they could be in a shopping centre etc) as long as they are truly accessible – which means well signposted, and welcoming to all. **It is not acceptable if they are not accessible to wheelchair users, or if homeless people are likely to be turned away from them. There should also be distance criteria** from the nearest major public place. So of the proposed closures, there should be an assessment for each location, and if there are no alternative toilets within a reasonable distance, then the Council should think again.

School crossing patrols (lollipop people)

- Road traffic accidents are a major cause of child death. However, we need to encourage parents and children to walk or cycle to school for all sorts of reasons. **'Lollipop' people are highly visible and are relatively low cost.**
- With reference to the specific proposals, we need a better rationale on which they are based. Can you think of a school near you where the crossing patrol is clearly needed?

Withdrawal of funding for Neighbourhood Partnerships

- While there are flaws with some Neighbourhood Partnerships, they need to be reformed rather than broken. They involve communities in developing their areas and help community groups by awarding Wellbeing Grants; plans to lessen the funding to these groups could undermine their effectiveness.
- Neighbourhood Partnerships have access to Community Impact Levy (CIL) funding and the changes will make this funding available over a wider area. CIL is intended to improve amenity in areas of development, so the changes will mean that the neighbourhoods which have new buildings might not be the area where the CIL money is being spent – what do you think of that?

Supporting People budget:

- **Reducing these services for the city's most vulnerable people is a false economy and will likely increase costs elsewhere.**
- It is already nationally recognised that **mental ill-health is a 'Cinderella service' that does not attract as much public funding as other health services. These cuts will increase that imbalance.**
- 'Most services are provided by voluntary and community organisations' (p.2). **The cuts will have a huge impact on this sector which employs some of the lowest paid staff in the city.** This will have a negative impact on deprivation levels and the economic well-being of the city.
- The Consultation document sets out four options and asks for views on each 'on a scale of 1-5' (p.10). **It is impossible and inappropriate to compare services, some of which are specialist, costly and used by few people** (e.g. supported accommodation for hearing impaired) whilst others have an impact on many (e.g. advice service, community mental health support).

- **Option A (reduction of 25% for all services)** is totally unrealistic without evidence of whether any or all services could survive such a reduction.
- **Option B (no reductions in Accommodation Based services...reductions of 49% to all Floating Support Services.)** As with Option A there is no evidence on whether Floating Support services could survive such a cut. This option decimates services for people living in non-specialist accommodation and thus increases the likelihood of them losing their tenancies, benefits and capacity to remain independent and relatively healthy. It is likely to lead to increased homelessness and use of higher end and costlier services.
- **Option C (reduction of no less than 6% across all services and further reductions based on specific criteria).** The targeted-reduction approach is based on officer and mayoral priorities and assessments. So why consult?
- **Option D (similar of Option C but with a maximum reduction of 51% applied to any service area).** As with Options A & B this takes no account of the viability of reduced services. As with Option D it allows for more targeted reductions based on officer and mayoral priorities and assessments.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018/19:

<https://bristol.citizenspace.com/neighbourhoods/council-tax-reduction-scheme-for-2018-19/>

- **This scheme exempts the very poorest households from paying Council Tax.** It used to be paid for by national government, but for the last few years the Council has had to foot the bill.
- **The Council is now proposing that the very poorest households will not be completely exempt, they will all have to pay 25% of the bill.**
- Council Tax is inherently regressive (it costs poorer people a larger proportion of their income than richer people). A more progressive policy (such as that proposed by the Green Party) would instead be linked to land values which would lower tax for most residents. But in place of overall tax reform, the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme helps to make Council Tax a bit less regressive.
- At the annual budget meeting in February 2017, **the Conservatives** proposed an amendment to require a 25% minimum payment, but it was voted down by all other parties, mainly on the basis of the Equality Impact Assessment (politically neutral) which said “This proposal **will remove some of the current protection to children and adults in receipt of some disability benefits, lone parents with children under 5, people in receipt of carers benefits or war pensions and section 7 homeless people/families, so it would have a negative impact on vulnerable people from some equalities communities.**”
<https://bristolgreenparty.org.uk/news/greens-oppose-tory-tax-hike-for-poorest>
It is shockingly contradictory that the Labour administration is now making the same proposal just 5 months later.
- **This proposal would effectively deliver a huge tax rise for the very poorest in society, while not affecting the middle income or richest residents.**
- Aside from the immorality of the proposal, we think **it would cost as much as it saves.** Many of the families and individuals impacted by the cut will simply not be able to afford to pay. As a result they are likely go into arrears with the Council, or become homeless, both of which will cost the Council more in the long run. **No estimate of these costs has been provided in the consultation.**

What else you can do

Submitting a consultation response is just the start! To help challenge the cuts you can also:

- **Get active in the Green Party.** Contact the Bristol Green Party volunteer coordinator (volunteers@bristolgreenparty.org.uk) to get involved either in your local ward or at a citywide level (including several vacancies for party officers which are coming up this Autumn). You could even stand to be a councillor candidate!
- **Get active in one of the non-party-affiliated anti austerity campaign groups** in the city, such as [Bristol People's Assembly](#).
- **Get active in one of the focussed campaigns** against cuts to a particular service, for example [Love Bristol Libraries](#) (lovebristollibraries@gmail.com), or your local library may have its own campaign.
- **Take part in the planned march against austerity** in Bristol on 9th September (details TBC): <http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-biggest-anti-austerity-protest-236129>