

Liberal Democrat Party Amendment to 2015/16 Budget

Like all local authorities Wiltshire Council is facing ever increasing pressures on our budget, with more and more really tough decisions having to be made.

None of us came into local government to cut services, or try and reduce opportunities for people in our communities. These amendments to the Conservative administration's budget face up to these harsh realities and try to provide an alternative solution that we believe better meets the needs of Wiltshire's communities.

In order to find funding to try and mitigate some of the worst of the cuts being imposed we are calling for one of the most difficult and challenging decisions to be made, that is to increase the Council Tax by 1.9%, thus raising a net return of £1.7m.

This will result in an increase of just £23.23, or £0.45 per week, for band D properties, just £15.48 per year, £0.30 per week, for Band A households.

These proposals will reverse the need to introduce the new Garden Waste Tax of £40 annually, as well as protect local services such as the Wiltshire Hopper, Wiltshire Music Service, reductions in spending on local street scene, and reintroducing revenue spending opportunities for Area Boards.

This suggestion is not unique, indeed although the final numbers are not known it would appear that approximately half of Tier 1 authorities across the country will be choosing to increase Council Tax this year and not accepting the Council Tax Freeze Grant.

Spending Proposals

Garden Waste Collections

At the end of last year Wiltshire Council undertook a consultation asking the people of the county which of three uncosted solutions would be the best way of dealing with the spiralling costs of waste collections, 94% of the respondents were clear that they did not want to see a charge for the collections introduced.

Alongside this, many residents still remember the promises made by the council that the removal of their weekly household waste collections was to be matched by the introduction of **free** garden waste collections.

We are concerned that the true costs of implementing this new charged for scheme will prove prohibitive and the whole service will be placed at risk. We only need to look to neighbouring councils like North Somerset to see where the proposed policy has already failed and been abandoned.

The Liberal Democrat proposal is for the most popular of the options offered to residents in the consultation to be implemented and a 3 month break in Garden Waste collections to be introduced.

This will require an additional investment of £550,000 against the current administration proposals.

Wiltshire Music Service

Wiltshire punches above its weight in the number of professional musicians who start their learning and training in our county. We are rightly proud of this and would like to see this outstanding service maintained and protected.

Indeed, in a recent survey of schools across the county, the Music Service was one of the most popular amongst respondents.

Our proposals will reverse the saving of £148,000 proposed in the administrations budget and protect this service.

Wiltshire Hopper Service

Supporting the more vulnerable members of our community is an aim shared by all members of this council. It is hard to understand how withdrawing a service that helps some of these most vulnerable residents make vital journeys to hospital is helping achieve this.

However, it is also clear that the Wiltshire Hopper service does not operate as efficiently or as effectively as we may hope. Therefore, whilst retaining funding for the service for the next year, we are also asking the the provision of this service and the needs of its legitimate users should be considered in the review of subsidised public transport being undertaken by the council. We also envisage the proposed Community Transport Champion (see below) being able to help find viable and sustainable alternatives to this service for future years.

For the purposes of good budgeting we have included a full year's costing of the service in our amendments (£130,000) but would aim to see the review into this service completed inline with the rest of the PST consultation and review with a realistic replacement in place by January 2016.

Concessionary Fares

Wiltshire is a big rural county and many areas are poorly served by public transport. Additionally, even those lucky enough to live near bus routes may struggle to cope with the pressures and challenge of busses.

That is why the Taxi vouchers scheme is so important, and why we feel so strongly that it should be protected.

Likewise concessionary passes for carers, whilst sometimes difficult to justify in pure economic terms, offer a lifeline for some home trapped individuals who just would not be able to travel without support.

Reversal of this proposed withdrawal of this for future applicants will require an additional investment of £70,000.

Arts Grants

Wiltshire is proud of its heritage. We have much to celebrate in our county and good vibrant cultural activities lead not only to more robust sustainable communities, but they also attract external economic investment.

Community arts activities also play an important role in delivering opportunities for people in our rural towns and villages to interact and come together as a community.

Whilst we appreciate that all areas of our spend will need to feel the pinch, and will need to recognise that there is less funding available, we believe that the role played by Arts and Cultural groups across Wiltshire are too important to reduce funding by this level.

We propose reversing the proposed reduction in funding of £89,000 and instead maintaining the current spend. However, we would also like to see groups within the council, such as the Legacy Board, working more closely with community arts and cultural groups to deliver long-term sustainable solutions.

Museum Concessions

It is hard to argue that large well funded organisations, such as television companies or major publishers, should pay to take advantage of the services offered by our museum service.

However it is also a painful truth that these cuts will also impact on all of the other voluntary and local organisations who rely on the services of this service to help build local collections and create exciting and interesting history based attractions in towns and villages across the county.

We therefore propose that some work is undertaken to identify if there are opportunities for charging corporate users of the service, the existing free service to community groups should be maintained. As we have been unable to ascertain the level of savings that could be found by making just this change, rather than the full cuts recommended by the administration, we have for this year proposed reversing the whole cut of £70,000.

Highways and Street Scene

The administration's budget identifies a number of ways in which additional savings can be found from this service. Whilst accepting that some of these savings are deliverable we are keen to continue to support and develop the Community Teams responsible for helping maintain our towns and villages.

We absolutely accept that improved partnership working with Town and Parish councils could lead to savings, but we would like to see these savings invested in improving the overall capacity of the service.

Therefore we propose reversing £249,000 of the reduction in funding proposed by the administration, but would like to see this investment used to develop the service, not simply stop any rationalisations planned.

Community Transport Champion

The proposed review of funding for subsidised passenger transport is an unfortunate necessity. However, we strongly believe that more opportunities can be made of Community Transport based solutions.

Community First have done some great working with community to try and facilitate and develop community transport schemes. However, their cause has not always been at the top of the agenda when looking at all transport solutions within the council.

We are therefore proposing the establishment of a new position of Community Transport Champion within the council passenger transport team, who's dedicated role will be to promote and develop new opportunities for community transport groups to bid for and deliver services across the county.

This role will work in partnership with the established role at Community First to help develop the role of Community Transport Schemes across the county.

The role will require an investment of £50,000.

Area Board Funding

Area Boards are one of the real success stories of Wiltshire Council. However, the challenges of having only capital funding will impose severe restrictions on how the boards are able to support the good work of local community groups.

We propose replacing £363,000 of the Area Board capital funding with revenue funding, thus increasing the range of projects the boards are able to support.

Details of the breakdown of funding for each community board are detailed below.

	Current Capital Funding	Proposed Capital Funding	Proposed Revenue Funding
AMESBURY	£64,822.70	£39,416.07	£25,406.63
BRADFORD ON AVON	£39,795.66	£27,664.32	£12,131.33
CALNE	£45,607.04	£25,264.00	£20,343.04
CHIPPENHAM	£91,818.10	£54,759.00	£37,059.10
CORSHAM	£41,917.23	£26,575.71	£15,341.53
DEVIZES	£67,755.37	£41,852.14	£25,903.23
MALMESBURY	£41,067.80	£27,641.75	£13,426.05
MARLBOROUGH	£42,644.60	£23,605.14	£19,039.45
MELKSHAM	£56,141.23	£33,998.00	£22,143.23
PEWSEY	£38,045.44	£28,707.51	£9,337.93
RWB&C	£58,392.60	£36,178.43	£22,214.17
SALISBURY	£91,396.55	£61,644.64	£29,751.92
SOUTHERN WILTSHIRE	£43,664.83	£27,879.91	£15,784.92
SOUTH WEST WILTSHIRE	£76,522.73	£61,766.49	£14,756.24
TIDWORTH	£46,662.45	£31,941.68	£14,720.77
TROWBRIDGE	£91,003.81	£58,423.02	£32,580.79
WARMINSTER	£51,756.52	£33,674.81	£18,081.72
WESTBURY	£37,985.33	£23,007.39	£14,977.94
TOTALS		£664,000.00	£363,000.00
	£1,027,000.00		£1,027,000.00

Wiltshire Council Liberal Democrat Group