**Statement from the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment to the Bradford Council Budget and Council Tax Proposals for 2023/24**

This document has been produced by the Liberal Democrat Group, to highlight some of the areas the Liberal Democrat Group believes the Council should do differently. A full Liberal Democrat Budget would not start from the same place as the ruling Labour group however this amendment does seek to change the Council’s budget and provide a sharper focus on fighting crime, tackling inequality, responding to the threat of climate change and most importantly protect the most vulnerable children in the district.

The failure of the Labour Group and Senior Leaders to improve services to children has led to the damming criticism that despite our Labour-run Council being over 4 years into their ‘improvement journey’ the latest OFSTED report shows that the service is worse, not better. Previous Labour decisions taken to cut budgets and services for children have left the Council's budget in a shocking state with tens of millions extra being needed to fix service in a crisis of the ruling groups making.

This is money that now cannot be used to protect other services from inflation, money that cannot be invested in local services and **money that cannot be used to reduce the Council tax burden on the residents of the district.**

**Fighting Crime and Anti-social Behaviour**

The decision of the Labour West Yorkshire Mayor to cut dozens of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) flies in the face of the desperate need for residents to see authorities getting a grip on low-level offending and restore a sense of safety and security in local neighbourhoods. PCSOs are the officers on our streets, they are the backbone of neighbourhood policing teams and the direct link for most residents to law enforcement. With people’s confidence in police falling, decisions like this show how out of touch the Labour party is when it comes to making neighbourhoods safe.

This Liberal Democrat Amendment would make community safety a priority. We would invest in this area to support the police to gather the intelligence they need to catch and prosecute criminals, we would deal with those corners of neighbourhoods where Anti-social behaviour can flourish and we would roll out support for businesses to link directly with the police to tackle shoplifting and intimidating behaviour in neighbourhoods across the district.

**£250K to fund the equipment needed to set up several ‘Shop/Business watch’ schemes across the district in local shopping and business parades.**

Helping businesses through direct links with each other and the police to gather intelligence in real-time. Ensuring that the limited crime-fighting resources can respond where and when they are needed.

**750K to fund improvements to secure and improve areas blighted by anti-social behaviour and vandalism.**

Across the district there are dark or hidden corners where anti-social behaviour can flourish. This fund will allow ward Councillors to identify areas that would benefit from improved lighting, fencing or other measures that increase resilience to this type of criminal activity.

**Tackling Inequality**

It is the truth that some people simply do not have the same opportunities or resources to succeed purely based on their local context. We believe that many of the factors driving these inequalities are within the reach of the Council. A Liberal Democrat Council would tackle these inequalities.

Economically inequalities are hugely costly. The burden of ill health and lost opportunity caused by the failure of Children’s Services in Bradford and continuing poor educational achievement, low standards of housing and the quality of our environment lead to greater use of health and social care services, higher unemployment and lower productivity and economic performance. These challenges cannot be solved by the Council giving away cash or raising the bar to access services. This process simply cements inequality into the system leading to fewer high-quality jobs, poorer-quality housing, and lower family incomes which perpetuate disadvantage and inequality.

A Liberal Democrat Council would use its powers and taxes to close the inequality gap right across the district and fundamentally change the conditions into which people are born, live and work.

**Supporting Children’s Services and tackling inequality**

We believe the failure of the Labour Group to appoint an independent Children’s Advocate for the District, has contributed to their failure to improve Children’s Services. The role of the Advocate would not be there to audit the service, there are other agencies whose job that is. The role of the Children’s Advocate will be to monitor the Human Rights of all the Children in the District.

**This would be funded by a £500k initial set-up cost to fund a new Office of a Children’s Commissioner for the District.**

Further budget provisions will be made in future years when the post is created, and the costs of the Children’s Commissioner’s Office are known.

Without strong independent scrutiny, there is a huge risk that children in Bradford will continue to be let down.

**A Liberal Democrat budget will fund £150k per year for additional support for Children’s Services Scrutiny and the Office of the Children’s Advocate funded.**

**A £500,000 Well-Being Support fund to support children and young people given the disproportionate and inequitable impact of Covid-19 on their mental health**

This will increase investment in services to all young people allowing all areas to have access to Youth work and mental health support. This will pay for additional staff and support for youth work not provided by the Council.

Liberal Democrats recognise that not all young people can access the Youth Services indoors and that the Council has failed to recognise the importance of buildings to be used for the delivery of quality, sustainable youth work.

**To this end, the Liberal Democrat budget establishes a Youth Investment fund of £500k.**

**Responding to the Climate Emergency**

A Liberal Democrat Council will put at its heart a green thread of urgent action to protect our natural environment and to increase and protect our access to green spaces for everyone. We were proud to support the Council in becoming one of the first in the country to declare a climate emergency, but this must be followed up by bold actions. Tackling the climate crisis will need significant structural change to improve the conditions in which we and born, live and work if we are not to be significantly disrupted by climate change.

Liberal Democrats in Bradford will match our focus on green infrastructure, industry, transport, and employment with a focus on cleaner streets, rejuvenated parks, green spaces, and waterways. In streets and neighbourhoods across the district, we want to see an end to the shame of fly-tipping, vandalism and abandoned buildings and land.

Recent years’ experience has highlighted the importance of the local environment and green space for recreation and has revealed some of the problems with safe and equitable access which the Liberal Democrats see as key to supporting everyone to improve their physical and mental health.

We would wish to provide additional focus to the work by re-structuring the teams to include the addition of an Environmental Warden, a Community-Based Park Warden and an Allotments Service Education Officer who would ensure allotment sites are well managed and maintained. They would be responsible for increasing uptake and working with schools. Bridging the gap for people who might want one but do not know how to get started or cannot manage the site themselves. We would expect them to identify ways and spaces where more people can become involved with food production.

These posts would be tasked alongside the Neighbourhood Wardens, Parking Enforcement Wardens and Cleansing staff to specifically develop the natural environment and access to green spaces. These posts would be responsible for a Ward-based Environmental Action Plan which would include work to reduce the number of empty homes and derelict buildings, increase rates of recycling, and work with schools and large employers to develop and implement active travel plans.

**These posts would be supported by a £500k Environmental Action Budget This “green” fund would be administered by the Area Committee in conjunction with Ward Councillors.**

The Environmental Action Budget would be used to increase diversity in our green spaces and verges, support the development of Community Orchards and Community Growing projects, seek to end chemical spraying of weeds, and move towards a planet-friendly means of weed control.

**Strategic Investment of Council Taxes.**

The Council has in recent years created a Strategic Investment budget through which it seeks to generate additional income through its Strategy for Growth. This has led to the purchasing and investment in commercial properties and activities which we believe do not specifically tackle inequality.

A Liberal Democrat budget amendment would pause and review the Strategic Investment Budget. One thing that Covid-19 has taught us is the importance of open space, the natural environment and nature and biodiversity. This is not just an issue of public health it is also vital to the very health of our planet.

**Liberal Democrats would redirect the Strategic Investment Budget to fund investment in the rivers, waterways and water collection and cleaning processes (blue infrastructure), the green infrastructure of the district and community infrastructure as our response to tackling inequality and climate change.**

Work in this area would, for the Liberal Democrats, include the development of a network of urban and rural nature reserves and parks. Creating new Country Parks to link residents across the adjoining green infrastructure (for example to the Leeds West Country Park and the Yorkshire Dales) creates opportunities for everyone to experience nature on their doorsteps, workplaces, and easy access to the wider countryside for leisure activities.

**Reinvigorating City and Urban village centre**

During the lockdown many people worked from home. People have got used to shopping online or in local centres. These habits should be encouraged to continue after the lockdown. This will have a significant impact on current plans for the city centre and transport which need reassessing.

Liberal Democrats would like to see the establishment of an all-party review of current plans for the city centre in the light of reduced footfall from office-based staff in the centre and reduced demand for retail. The group would investigate and report on opportunities to prevent ‘white elephant’ office space for example, prevent the slow disintegration of heritage buildings and any further investment in poorer quality city centre flats. The review would aim to create more green spaces and spaces for nature in the city and other urban spaces, reduce the number of empty and derelict buildings and increase the number of accessible homes with gardens.

**Liberal Democrats would redirect some of the Strategic Investment Budget re-focus on the buying of blight site commercial property in non-City Centre areas of the district to improve and re-let them.**

Across the district, the Liberal Democrat amendment provides for an increase in support for Community Buildings that provide the space and the support for many of the most vulnerable in our communities**.**

**The additional £1 million pounds to the Community Buildings Support Grant is there to reduce the pressures of Inflation and the Cost of living on these vital neighbourhood and Community assets.**

Within the limiting constraints of the Council’s Budget today we have looked to make investments in protecting children, crime prevention, community buildings, neighbourhoods, and our environment.

Taken together the Liberal Democrat Amendment illustrates our commitment to the priorities of people across the district for a safer, cleaner, fairer, and greener Bradford not just in the major towns and city centre but across every neighbourhood.

Cllr Brendan Stubbs

Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group