

# Public Forum received for Budget Council



**Date:** Tuesday, 23 February 2021

**Time:** 2.00 pm

## 1. Public Petitions and Statements

The following statements have been received:

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10)

Ref No	Name
PS01	Alison Allan
PS02	Rob Bryher
PS03	David Redgewell
PS04	Rob Logan, Carolyn Magson, Cllr Tim Rippington & Katja Hörchen
PS05	Aileen McLoughlin
PS06	Kerry Bailes
PS07	Councillor Jo Sergeant



## **STATEMENT PS 01**

### **Submitted by Alison Allan**

Dear Mayor Rees

We are concerned about the suggested budget, which does not appear to take sufficient steps towards securing funding for retrofitting council housing.

Retrofitting is an extremely important action that must be taken to cut our carbon emissions. The council has the power to carry out retrofitting, which would help towards its climate goals and towards tackling the climate emergency.

To do this, the council needs as much money for its housing as possible. The Rent Policy and Rent Standard allows Local Authorities to increase rents each year by a small amount. Because of the way housing finances work, doing this would increase the future funding available for repairing and maintaining council houses - and for retrofitting them.

Enacting a rent freeze actually takes around £60 million out of the housing finances - money that is desperately needed!

The poorest people in council housing in Bristol do not pay rent, as their rent is paid by housing benefit or universal credit, so this will not affect them. It will also not affect anyone who has applied for a council reduction as a result of the pandemic. For those who work and earn enough not to get housing benefits, they still have access to the cheapest housing in the city.

The climate emergency is hitting the poorest hardest - both in our city and worldwide. It is hitting our brothers and sisters in the Global South the hardest.

The council must do everything it can to meet its climate goals and cut its carbon emissions. We urge the council to do the right thing and to raise money for this important job by stopping the rent freeze.

Alison Allan  
for  
Bristol Labour for a Green New Deal

## STATEMENT PS 02

Submitted by Rob Bryher

Dear Councillors

The budget is a chance for the administration to present a clear vision for the transformation of transport in the city. **I am really pleased that the Labour administration is proposing these savings and funding streams** (amongst others):

New parking charges, rising in line with inflation (revenue budget)

Bristol Legible City Scheme (capital budget)

Transport Clean Air Zone Implementation (capital budget)

**Of the opposition amendments, please ensure you support the amendments "Green Party Revenue 2" and "Green Party Capital".**

### **Revenue budget**

Workplace parking levy. We need additional funding to improve public transport in the city. You are very aware of the limits on funding from Government and so we need to do everything we can to increase funding for schemes that make public transport more widespread, regular, reliable and cheap.

### **Capital budget**

Strategic capital fund for transport. This is crucial if we want to ensure we don't lose momentum on our liveable neighbourhoods ambitions. We can't be certain that more funding will come from Government on this agenda and so this ensures we can move forwards with more schemes on top of those that have been announced and are in the consultation process at the moment (or have just been consulted upon).

Thanks for reading,

Rob Bryher (submitted in a personal capacity)

## **STATEMENT PS 03**

### **Submitted by David Redgewell, South West Transport and Railfuture Severnside**

Please find this budget public statement.

1. We like to support public transport subsidies for weca mayoral transport authority for supported bus service being passported to the west of England combined authority. This is as well as covid 19 bus operator's operators grant from the department for transport and in future bus operators recovery grant paid directly to weca mayoral transport authority.

We wish to see in the money to maintain bus shelters infrastructure and realtime information displays.

We support money the reconstruction of Cumberland road for metro bus service.

The chocolate path and the Harbour railway.

Opening of Portway parkway on the Severn Beach, St Andrew road Avonmouth, Portway Parkway Shirehampton, Sea Mills ,Clifton Down Redland, Montpellier, Stapleton Road Lawrence hill station, Bristol Temple Meads, Keynsham, Oldfield park, Bath Spa Freshford, Avoncliffe, Bradford on Avon, Trowbridge, Westbury, Warminster or Frome route 30 minutes service from December 2021.

We need capital budget for bus priority measures for the bus deal with first group. Across the city region. Hope that stagecoach west and Hct will join the Bus quality partnership scheme.

On Cribbs Causeway bus station, Southmead, Henleaze, Clifton down station city centre, Broadmead Bristol Temple meads, Hengrove Stockwood route 22a service should operate via the Southmead hospital bus station.

Money for more bus routes

Metro west railway service From Bristol Temple meads to Portishead

Bristol Temple meads to Henbury line.

and the mass transit system.

CCTV on local Bristol railway stations

We want to see more money for community toilets and Important public toilets, provision.

In parks

The city centre Broadmead Queen Square and Harbourside.

Any money from the sale of public toilets blocks should be reinvested in new facilities including fully accessible toilets and changing places.

Cafe unit in any conversation of toilets must retain accessible toilets.

Public toilets are very important with covid 19 and for the residents and the Tourists economy.

We like to see money in the budget for Visit west and destinations Bristol.

Tourism worth 1.4 billion pounds.

To Greater Bristol and 600 000 jobs.

We want to see more money spent on Tagging and Graffiti removal in the city from Public historic buildings the public transport network.

With action by the city council the Bristol mayor weca mayoral transport authority and the Avon and Somerset police British transport police to prosecute people.

## **STATEMENT PS 04**

**Submitted by Rob Logan and Carolyn Magson, Labour Candidates for Brislington West  
Cllr Tim Rippington and Katja Hörchen, Labour Candidates for Brislington East**

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### **'INVESTMENT IN COVID RECOVERY'**

Bristol has pulled together to cope with the impact of lockdown and the Covid-19 pandemic. Communities all across the city, not least in our community of Brislington, have come together to support each other – sharing resources, collecting and delivering medicines, food and other essentials, keeping each other going.

But Brislington's economy has been hit hard, with places of work shuttered across the area – hospitality and retail especially.

As the nation looks forward tentatively to the progress of the vaccination programme and the gradual re-opening of schools, workplaces and places to meet, we must invest in our local high streets.

Many people across the city have started to get used to a more local approach to shopping, for both essential items and general retail – and are rightly demanding investment in their local high streets.

If the city is able to access any ringfenced funding for the development and resilience of local high streets, it is critical that shopping areas in Brislington receive their fair share of this. We are particularly keen to see investment in The Concourse and Brislington Hill shopping precinct, where the opportunities are immense. This will deliver a lasting legacy to this part of Brislington.

## STATEMENT PS 05

Submitted by Aileen McLoughlin

Providing Council Housing must not be compromised and must be open to full scrutiny

- to maximise future council homes for social rent we need to maximise funds in HRA
- lost income (rents) in HRA this year will have a cumulative effect over 30 years that impacts current and future borrowing capacity on HRA
- to cover £500 million projected cost of making housing stock carbon neutral we need to maximise funds in HRA

### *5-year capital programme*

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	TOTAL
£64.8m	£25.8m	£8.5m	£4.6m	£0.0m	£103.7m

- we need to keep building - Appendix 3 Cabinet paper suggests we are not planning home building in 2025/6
- moving funding between 'land-led' and 'developer-led' budgets and approving individual deals must be scrutinised - overview by a cabinet member is not enough
- we must protect the principle that any council land must be offered first to housing department and Goram Homes for "first refusal" then to Community led Developers before going to the private sector
- plans to split council builds 70:30 between homes for social rent and shared ownership (part-rent/part-buy) - this is new and reduces the number of homes for social rent - people on waiting list cannot afford shared ownership
- For shared ownership assuming 40% share purchased - rent set at between 1.5% and 2% of unsold equity. I thought that BCC policy was 1.5%, set at this level because anything higher would be unaffordable

### **Officer assessments state:**

- Applying the rent increase in 2021/22 could deliver £8.5m over a five year period which will then be available to fund additional revenue or capital expenditure, or a combination of both.
- For 2021/22 the additional resource created by the rent increase would be added to reserves to support delivery over the next 5 years of the planned capital programme which can then be used to maintain and develop stock including zero carbon retrofitting. Increasing dwelling rents by CPI +1% (1.5%) would result in average rent levels for BCC council homes increasing from £81.35 to £82.57 (an average increase of £1.22 per week).
- Rent levels would remain significantly lower than market rents for Bristol.
- For a significant proportion of tenants (estimate between 50-65%) the increase would be met by additional Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (housing element).
- The impact of the rent increase is an additional £1.7m income for 2021/22 and £51m (no inflationary uplift) income over the life of the 30 year HRA business plan.

In Feb 2020 Full Council agreed to a modest Rent Rise in line with Rent Policy Guidance. It was a hard decision but based on the need to maximise the present and future budget for social housing repairs

and maintenance and protecting the Bristol social home building program. No-one wants to increase rents but when the consequences of not doing so are a reduction in borrowing capacity and reducing funds needed for long overdue social housing essential repairs or improvements there is no real choice. We need to recognise that a rent freeze would be a decision achieving short term gain with long term damage.

In last year's budget we agreed that "in order to respond to inflationary pressures, deal with regulatory issues and to ensure we have the borrowing capacity for 900 new council homes this council approves an inflationary rent increase in line with the Government rent policy for the HRA of CPI+1%, namely 2.7%". These requirements have not changed.

Average rent would increase by small sums in the context of Council rents being much below market rents in Bristol. For around half of tenants the increase will be met by additional Housing Benefit and universal credit subsidy, if anything the pandemic is likely to have increased this proportion. Those on the waiting list or in temporary accommodation will not thank us for risking the build of future social homes for small reductions in rent for those who have council homes. Tenants whose bills are high when they wait for window repairs will save on rent but not on bills.

The impact of a rent increase is compounded, it does not just affect this year – last year's estimate was that it would generate an additional £141m over the life of the business plan. The additional income would also increase the borrowing potential of the HRA and increase the 5 year capital programme. It would enable the Council to accelerate the programme of improvement works on the HRA stock and Carbon neutrality. It would enable more new homes to be built over the next 5 years, bringing in additional rental income, which can then be used to maintain and develop stock including zero carbon retrofitting. The loss of borrowing capacity of not putting the rent up will be tens of millions - under last year's rules and costs this would deliver up to 1,000 homes.

Why we need a rent rise in line with Rent Policy:

- We need to maximise funds in HRA to meet our commitments to housing repair/improvements
- We need to maximise fund in HRA to meet our commitments to retro-fitting and carbon reduction in our housing stock
- We need to take advantage of the cumulative increase in HRA over 30 years of a small increase this year – we lose this forever not just for one year
- We need the increase in expected rental income to borrow against to protect our social housing program – just like individuals need income to gain a mortgage
- We have this chance now but it could be snatched from us by a Tory Government at any time – we cannot risk weakening our ability to improve social housing in the City
- All decisions must guarantee our long term commitment to a strong social housing programme – small rent increases are a necessary evil to achieve this
- we need to prioritise Goram Homes, Council homes and Community led housing in any decisions about use if council owned land
- we need to maintain current levels if scrutiny around land use and council home programs

Aileen McLoughlin

## **STATEMENT PS 06**

### **Submitted by Kerry Bailes**

Freezing council rents now, only a short period after launching the Moving Forward Together Programme in 2019 only makes a mockery of the commitment made by the council to its tenants which states,

"The Moving Forward Together (MFT) programme aims to transform the way services are delivered, putting the priorities of tenants at the heart of the housing service.

Working closely with tenants, the council's housing and landlord team will be developing a service built around delivering what residents have said are their main priorities. MFT also aims to deliver a more equal, inclusive and representative service. "

As a Council Tenant of over 20 years, I was not consulted on whether a rent freeze would be beneficial or not. The decision has been made by the cabinet and not the tenants, thus taking away our right to decide for ourselves whether the rent increase should go ahead this year as planned or not. Tenants have been encouraged to not report non urgent repairs during the pandemic, those repairs are still waiting to be reported, creating a larger scale backlog needing immediate attention once the pandemic is over. Tenants who have paid for the repairs needed, to be done privately during the pandemic, at great cost to them, I'm sure, would appreciate the importance of paying less for repairs and maintenance in future through an extra reasonable weekly charge of less than £1.50 (20p a day, over 7 days).

The equivalent amount of money saved by the council on repairs alone (which is now in the reserves) will have cost the tenant a much greater sum, and therefore keeping it in the reserves is a false assumption that it is a saving and not a cut to the councils repairs and maintenance service.



## **STATEMENT PS 07**

### **Submitted by Councillor Jo Sergeant**

I wish to express my personal support for the Green Party's amendment to the Budget, allowing us to implement the CPI +1% increase in rent on council homes for the 2021-22 budget year.

It may seem odd that a Labour councillor would support an increase in outgoings for council tenants, however modest, in such challenging times.

However I would point out the following:

- The HRA 30 year rolling budget, which does not stop just because of Covid 19 and all its associated problems.
- The commitment of this administration to build not only housing but affordable housing.
- The viability arguments of private developers (including housing associations), which prevent them from delivering the numbers of social/affordable housing the city needs.
- The costs of private rent, even on former council properties sold on under Right to Buy, being far greater than council rents.
- The loss of income from the Benefits pot, which is the only other way we can fund council house building, maintenance and repair, besides from our tenants' pockets.
- The number of Bristolians waiting for a council home or council tenants waiting to upsize from an overcrowded property (which can have a major impact on mental wellbeing). This currently stands at 15,365. That's just those who have managed to get on the Homechoice system.
- The shortage of staff available to conduct necessary repairs to council properties, leading to tenants either funding them (at greater cost than the proposed rent increase) or the properties falling into further disrepair and costing even more to put right.

In the likelihood of this amendment falling, I would like to ask that both them in his capacity of council leader, and the Conservative Group, lobby the Conservative Government, who have enabled a rent increase, that their own Bristol Councillors feel they cannot support, to obtain funding to plug the gap in the HRA so that we continue to support all low-income families in Bristol and not just current council tenants.