

Motion E – Liberal Democrat Amendment

Councils at Breaking Point

Proposed by: Cllr Dixon

Seconded by: Cllr Dennison

This Council notes that many council budgets are now at Breaking Point. Austerity, implemented by the Conservative and Liberal Democrats, when in Government, has caused huge damage to communities up and down the UK, with devastating effects on key public services that protect the most defenceless in society – children at risk, disabled adults and vulnerable older people – and the services we all rely on, like clean streets, libraries, children’s centres and schools;

- Tory cuts mean councils have lost 60p out of every £1 that the last Labour Government was spending on local government in 2010;
- Councils had to spend an extra £800m last year to meet the demand on vital services to protect children;
- With an aging population and growing demand adult social care faces a gap of £3.5 billion – with only 14% of council workers now confident that vulnerable local residents are safe and cared for
- Government cuts have seen over 500 children’s centres and 475 libraries close, potholes are left unfilled, and 80% of council workers now say have no confidence in the future of local services;
- By 2020, all of Haringey’s 69 schools will have faced cuts with a net loss of £346 per pupil
- Northamptonshire has already gone bust due to Tory incompetence at both national and local level, and more councils are predicted to collapse without immediate emergency funding
- Councils now face a further funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025 just to keep services ‘standing still’ and meeting additional demand. Even <https://www.ft.com/content/9c6b5284-6000-11e7-91a7-502f7ee26895>, the Conservative Chair of the Local Government Association, has said ‘Councils can no longer be expected to run our vital local services on a shoestring’
- To stop planned further cuts to local authorities, the Chancellor needs to find an additional £1.3bn next year.

This Council condemns Chief Secretary to the Treasury Liz Truss for stating on BBC Newsnight on 1st October 2018 that the government is “not making cuts to local authorities”, when all independent assessments of government spending show that this is entirely false; and that this Council further notes that Prime Minister Theresa May has also claimed that “austerity is over” despite planning a further £1.3bn of cuts to council budgets over the next year;

This Council believes that there should be increased freedoms for councils based on recognition that councils are democratic, transparent, and accountable, and that councillors can be trusted not to overstep the boundaries of acceptability set by regular interactions with the ballot box. This should include immediate abolition of the council tax referendum limit, increased powers to levy higher council tax on empty homes, and the ability to look at local taxes such as land value tax, tourism tax, and possibly even local retention of a portion of income tax;

The Council notes that the Government’s own forecasts imply that tax revenues will be £15 billion lower by 2020 as a result of Brexit. Therefore, Council believes that Brexit poses an unacceptable threat to the UK’s public finances and the money available for local government and that bringing an end to austerity necessarily involves an exit from Brexit;

This Council agrees with the aims of the ‘Breaking Point’ petition signed by labour councillors across the country, in calling for the Prime Minister and Chancellor to truly end austerity in local government by:

- Using the Budget to reverse next years planned £1.3bn cut to council budgets;

- Immediately investing £2bn in children's services and £2bn in adult social care to stop these vital emergency services from collapsing;
- Pledging to use the Spending Review to restore council funding to 2010 levels over the next four years

This Council resolves to

- Support the 'Breaking Point' campaign, recognising the devastating impact that austerity has had on our local community
- Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government setting out the funding pressures faced by our local council, and calling on the Government to truly end austerity in local government