

Camden Conservatives budget amendment 2021/22

Confirmation by the Executive Director Corporate Services that amendment is balanced

“The Executive Director Corporate Services confirms that, should the amendments be agreed, the assurances required by Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 with regard the adequacy of the reserves and the robustness of the estimates have been met and, therefore, that this still constitutes a balanced budget for 2020/21. The Executive Director Corporate Services or other officers have not been able to give these proposals the depth of consideration and due diligence to be able to recommend this as a course of action. It has not been possible to make a full and comprehensive assessment of the impact of these proposals (such as those linked to the future use of our buildings or the impact on the existing workforce) and the associated implementation issues and risks.

“It should also be noted that the full economic and social impact of the Covid pandemic into 2021/22 is not yet known. The social and economic impact of any ongoing measures to address the pandemic may adversely impact the viability of the proposals.”

Helping Camden bounce back

Proposal	£000
Spread the streaterie success with a Streateries Fund	150 ^A
Introduce dedicated Pop-up Shops Fund	100
Regenerate local centres with new Urban Village Heritage Fund	50
Create pocket parks with new Pocket Park Fund	102
Open two outdoor gyms	52
Trial smart bins at 90 hotspots to manage street waste	30
Create dedicated mental wellbeing grants	80
Introduce a specific street licence for trading from red phone boxes	37
Grant 100% discretionary business rates relief to all music venues run by non-profit community interest companies	0 ^B

^B £50,000 of which is recurring, and £100,000 is a one-off cost for 2021/22 and not recurring

^B There are currently no CIC music venues in Camden, so no cost in 2021/22, but costs expected in future years

Ensuring our kids catch up

Proposal	£000
Help our kids to catch up by ensuring every FSM-eligible pupil has a digital device to learn remotely	788 ^A
Make annual grants of £50,000 in Camden's community libraries	50
Extend Swiss Cottage Library opening hours and open on Sundays	57
Roll out coding clubs in every state school and reduce the cost	160

^A £389,000 of which is recurring, and £399,000 is a one-off cost for 2021/22 and not recurring

Making Camden cleaner

Proposal	£000
Restore weekly bin collections	904
Make garden waste collection free of charge	251
Provide separate nappy collection bins	20
Sponsor the development of web tools to improve recycling	50 ^A
Open Regis Road reuse and recycling centre for one evening a week	12
Increase fines for fly-tipping to the legal maximum	(20)
Increase fines for littering to the legal maximum	(80)
Introduce fines for littering from a motor vehicle	0 ^B

^A One-off cost for 2020/21, not a recurring cost

^B Costs and receipts net out to zero

Making Camden greener

Proposal	£000
Install 1,000 electric car charging points per year for next two years	478 ^A
Make cycling part of PE lessons in every school	255 ^B
Reduce the impact of roadworks by charging to close roads with a lane rental scheme on trial basis	(212)
Suspend routine precautionary pollarding of street trees	(134)
Expand HomeRun app to all state schools in Camden	76
Remove school run traffic with a grant to restore a school bus service	50

Engine idling fines increased to £80	(1)
Double spending on enforcement of engine idling prohibitions	0 ^c

^a One-off cost for 2021/22, with a further one-off cost for 2022/23, not a recurring cost

^b £119,000 of which is recurring, and £136,000 is a one-off cost for 2021/22 and not recurring

^c Costs and receipts net out to zero

Making Camden safer

Proposal	£000
Open a police base in Hampstead	306 ^A
Open a police base in Swiss Cottage	306 ^A
Fund deployment of SmartWater across the borough	163
Install CCTV in crime hotspots	95
Give Council Tax Reduction to special constables	47

^A £102,000 of which is recurring, and £204,000 is a one-off cost for 2021/22 and not recurring

Supporting Camden's communities

Proposal	£000
Install 10 publicly-accessible defibrillators	16 ^A
Send information packs to residents when they move in	82
Resume postal notifications of planning applications	31

^A £1,000 of which is recurring, and £15,000 is a one-off cost for 2021/22 and not recurring

Maximising revenue and reducing fraud

Proposal	£000
Renting out top two floors of 5PS	(500)
Use two-thirds of unused (void) parking spaces on estates for paid-for parking and transfer £500,000 to the Housing Revenue Account	(1,500) ^A
Investment in fraud detection	0 ^B
Increase income from film service by 50%	(40)

^A In addition, revenue of £500,000 to the Housing Revenue Account budget, which is not in this budget

^B Net savings expected to be realised in 2022/23

Making Camden more efficient

Proposal	£000
Fix Camden's website	60 ^A
Develop a consolidated Camden app	50 ^A
Shared digital with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea	(1,500)
Shared HR services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea	(195)
Shared legal services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea	(230)
Shared strategy and change services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea	(310)
Shared procurement services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea	(138)
Additional reduction in agency and consultancy spend	(200)
Reduce spending on Camden's external communication department by 50%	(665)
Adopt 'bring your own' digital device for non-frontline Camden staff	(100)
Freeze councillor allowances for a year and reverse previous increase in Cabinet members' allowances	(137)
End funding for trade union facility time	(149)
Scrap Camden magazine	0
End grant to Love Camden	(15)

^A One-off cost for 2021/22, not a recurring cost

Cutting Council Tax and balancing the budget

Proposal	£000
Sum of budget adjustments	(1,197)
Reduce Council Tax by 1%	1,195
Budget surplus in 2021/22	2
Recurring surplus to be realised in 2022/23 as well	2,001

Proposed by: Cllr Andrew Parkinson

Seconded by: Cllr Oliver Cooper

Explanatory notes

Streateries fund – The Streateries established in 2020 were an enormous success. But unlike in Westminster, where the bill was paid by the council, those in Camden were funded by local councillors funding them by Hampstead Town, Belsize, and Frognal & Fitzjohns councillors through local CIL in Belsize Village and South End Green and by the Business Improvement District in Fitzrovia. We will support the creation of six further al fresco dining areas across the borough, providing much needed support for our hospitality sector during the crucial summer months and beyond.

Dedicated pop-up shop fund – Camden’s high streets are struggling, with some – including the town centre at Swiss Cottage and Finchley Road – at risk of falling below the critical mass required to sustain themselves. At the same time, many Camden residents have set up new businesses at home or online. We will create a dedicated fund of £100,000 to support new pop-up shops to fill empty units on high streets with short-to-medium term tenants. Grant funding would be available to support property costs, marketing, and compliance required due to the leap for the business into having physical retail premises for the first time.

Introduce urban village heritage fund to regenerate one village centre a year – Our neighbourhood retail centres are more important than ever, with more people shopping locally. There is a direct link between creating an attractive shopping environment and increased footfall, as demonstrated by the recent successes of Belsize Village. We would offer grants to parades or clusters of shops in our small urban villages in conservation areas – such as South End Green, York Rise, Marchmont Street, and Regents Park Road – where some shopfronts do not make a positive contribution to the character of the area. The newly-improved character-enhancing frontages would then be written into conservation area appraisals: locking in the attractive appearance long-term. This will transform the built environment, creating new jobs and improving the viability of local businesses.

Pocket Park fund – Empty construction sites and plots on land owned by Camden Council are a stain on our local street scene, and miss out on creating great spaces for people to enjoy. We will fund the creation of two pocket parks to transform neglected spaces into thriving green spaces – improving our environment and mental and physical health.

Open two outdoor gyms – The closure of gyms has impacted people’s mental and physical wellbeing. In addition, some gyms have closed and some residents’ financial resources become too stretched for membership, so many will be unable to return to gyms for the foreseeable future. We will provide for two new outdoor gyms – enabling those unable to access a gym a space to exercise locally.

Trial the introduction of smart bins in 90 litter hotspots – Littering continues to blight our streets. We will trial 90 new smart bins in litter hotspots. These robot-bins use solar power to compact waste – increasing internal capacity ten-fold. They also provide real-time information on capacity, enabling emptying schedules to be timed to occur when bins are nearing capacity. This trial scheme therefore has the potential to deliver significant savings in the future, as experienced by other local authorities such as Islington and Windsor & Maidenhead.

Introduce dedicated mental wellbeing grants – Coronavirus has had a significant impact on residents' well-being. It is estimated that there are over 50,000 new cases of moderate-severe depression and 37,000 new cases of moderate-severe anxiety in adults without pre-existing mental health conditions. To address this, we will create a new dedicated fund to embed mental wellbeing best practice in organisations for which it has not been a core responsibility to support initiatives that support mental wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and support the prevention of suicide and self-harm in those most likely to be affected.

Introduce a specific street licence for trading from red phone boxes – Camden has been inconsistent with its licensing for people trading from repurposed red phone boxes, with some traders expected to buy a full street trading pitch licence, rather than a kiosk licence. This threatens the viability of trading from red phone boxes: thus expediting the loss of these heritage assets. This amendment creates a new class of kiosk licence specifically for red phone boxes where no goods are stored or displayed outside the box: ending this lack of clarity and creating flexibility in the setting of different terms and conditions.

Grant 100% discretionary business rates relief to all music venues run by non-profit community interest companies – The government has just introduced a 50% reduction in business rates for small music venues, while Westminster City Council just introduced 100% Rates relief for music venues run by community interest companies (CICs). This proposal would mirror Westminster's policy. There are no CIC music venues in Camden, but we expect favourable tax treatment to encourage some take-up in future years.

Help our kids to catch up by ensuring every FSM-eligible pupil has a digital device to learn remotely – Digital access is essential to enable pupils to catch up learning after-school and in the holiday periods. Although the government has provided thousands of laptops to Camden school in the last 8 months, approximately 2,700 pupils eligible for free school meals in Camden schools do not have access to a suitable device for remote learning. Camden Learning is making a profit of £300,000 this year, with no plans as to what to spend it on. As a result, we will offer to fund the cost of a laptop and wi-fi connection, sharing the costs through match-funding with Camden Learning.

Make annual grants of £50,000 in Camden's community libraries – We would make available £50,000 of grants to the three community libraries within Camden – Belsize Community Library, Primrose Hill Library, and Keats Library in Hampstead. This supports community institutions that are under financial pressure, as well as ensuring they can provide longer hours of opening to allow people to study and learn as we recover from Covid.

Extend Swiss Cottage Library opening hours and open on Sundays – Swiss Cottage Library is by far Camden's largest and most used library, but is not open on Sundays and is open much shorter hours than Pancras Square. We would extend its hours to match Pancras Square (8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday) and open it on Sundays. This would enable more children and students to study over weekends and in evenings, as well as those retraining in a new career in light of Covid.

Roll out coding clubs in every state school and reduce the cost – Camden committed in 2014 to having a coding club in every school, but it does not yet. Moreover, take-up of coding club places by low-income households is reportedly limited because of the cost to parents. This proposal would create a coding club in every school and reduce by 50% the cost of places.

Restore weekly bin collections – Camden is almost alone in London in collecting many residents' bins less than once a week – indeed, most residents in Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, and Islington have theirs collected more than once a week. The demand in Camden has only grown due to Covid, with more people spending more time at home now and into the future. Camden's dirty streets – with the second-most fly-tipping incidents of any council in the country – are testament to the results. Despite claims that it would boost recycling, recycling has still not returned to the levels it was at in 2010, when bins were collected twice a week. Furthermore, the cuts to bin collections in 2017 has been followed by a quadrupling of costs associated with cleaning up fly-tipping: now £600,000 more than two years ago. Restoring weekly collections for all residents would substantially reduce this cost, but this saving is not factored in here.

Make garden waste collection free of charge – Camden's charge for garden waste is among the highest in the country: twice the national average. Because charging to collect garden waste reduces recycling rates and discourages good environmental stewardship, the Government is consulting on banning councils for charging for garden waste collection. We would scrap the charge for garden waste collection and make it free again.

Provide separate nappy collection bins – Residents are not issued with separate bins for nappies: forcing some parents to keep them unhygienically. We would provide nappy bins to all parents that take up the service.

Sponsor the development of web tools to improve recycling – We would invest to facilitate the existing database of what can be recycled to be accessed by a form on the website, via an app, via Alexa and other virtual assistants, etc, so that users can easily find out whether any given item can be recycled. In future years, this can then be licensed across other areas to raise money and more than make up the cost and generate a trading profit to reinvest in prompting recycling.

Open Regis Road reuse and recycling centre for one evening a week – Regis Road recycling centre is open only until 4:15pm every day. This can make it difficult for non-professionals to use it. We would open the recycling centre one evening a week to make it easier to use it. Savings from reduced fly-tipping are not factored in.

Increase fines for early payment of fly-tipping fines to 75% of the maximum – Camden is one of very few councils in the country to discount fines for fly-tipping so heavily when paid early: effectively making the fine £200 for most fly-tippers, not the maximum £400. Barnet and Haringey do not discount at all for early payment, which is the ultimate objective, but until fuller impact analysis can be done, we propose increasing the discount for early payment to £300 instead of this unwarranted leniency.

Increase fines for littering to the legal maximum – Camden imposes fines of just £100 for littering, rather than the £150 maximum. Westminster and Haringey impose the full £150 fine, and we propose Camden does likewise.

Introduce fines for littering from a motor vehicle – In 2018, councils were given powers to fine car owners if litter was thrown from their car, whether or not it could be proven that they were driving. Camden has not yet used this power, and we would introduce fines to clamp down on littering.

Install 1,000 electric car charging points per year for next two years – Camden has one of Inner London’s smallest networks of electric car charging points, with half as many chargers per capita as Wandsworth and Kensington & Chelsea, and one third as many as Westminster. Within two years, we would install 2,000 ordinary speed charging points in lamp-posts to facilitate charging in large numbers of residents’ parking bays (which would, because they would be widespread, be able to be retained as residents’ parking bays accessible to all vehicles). These figures reflect costs after grants were received by other councils, including London boroughs and Brighton & Hove.

Make cycling part of PE lessons in every school – Despite political commitments to become the most cycling-friendly borough, the proportion of Camden residents cycling every week has fallen since 2010. Compared to other London boroughs, Camden has slipped from having the 5th-most people cycling every week of any borough to the 11th-most. This proposal would fund the teaching of cycling as part of PE in every school to build up competence, social norms, and commitment to cycling. For the cost of a single cycle lane, 10,000 Camden pupils can be taught to cycle – which would be far more effective at promoting cycling.

Street Works Lane Rental Scheme – We would introduce a trial lane rental scheme to charge utility companies and others up to £2,500 a day to close the busiest roads or lanes of roads to conduct roadworks. TfL has had this power since 2012, and it has reduced serious disruption from roadworks on the roads covered by 54% and increased the number of works where companies work together by 65%. Not only would this deliver significant savings, but it would incentivise utilities companies to coordinate works: reducing congestion, inconvenience to residents, and air pollution. Camden would be the second council in the country to adopt such a scheme since all councils were given the power in 2019, after Surrey Council County, which estimates it would raise £2.7m.

Suspension of routine precautionary pollarding – Routine precautionary pollarding strips our trees of their leaves on a biennial basis. In line with the policy in Barnet Council, we would suspend this routine pollarding, and employ pollarding only in cases where streets were specifically designed and planted with pollarding in mind or where individual case management requires. This will lead to significant environmental benefits.

Expand HomeRun app to all schools in Camden – School run traffic has been reduced by a third in Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire by the use of the HomeRun app – developed by Camden residents – which both facilitates car pooling and gives schools the data to encourage parents to stop driving to school. Use of the HomeRun app by South Hampstead High School and University College School has cut use of cars for the school run by a third, too, but its effectiveness would be higher if it covered all schools. We would contract with HomeRun to deploy it across every school in Camden.

Provide grant to restore its school bus service – Green School Runs launched a bus service for schools in Hampstead and Highgate to reduce the number of cars on the road, but this was not financially viable. We would provide a grant to sustain a school bus scheme if each school underwrites the rest to ensure it returns to viability.

Engine idling fines increased to £80 – While Camden issues fines of just £20 for deliberate engine idling, Westminster imposes £80 fines using a road traffic order – and due to the success there, other councils are following suit. This is not intended as a revenue-raising proposal, but it is likely that a small surplus would arise.

Double spending on enforcement of engine idling prohibitions – Investment in catching deliberate engine idlers, especially in the vicinity of schools is money well spent. Together with the increased fines, it would not cost anything (net) to increase enforcement in known hotspots.

Open a police base in Hampstead – Fortune Green Road station is becoming crowded with more police officers due to the national government’s recruitment drive, yet is not convenient for most residents that its officers patrol to visit. We would therefore provide a grant under the Police Act to the Met to open a new police base in Hampstead. This would host the Safer Neighbourhood Team and provide a contact point, in Hampstead Village, where Camden is a large freeholder of commercial properties. If a unit is not available, a base could alternatively be opened at the Royal Free Hospital, which is open 24/7 and has already offered use of currently-unused space for free.

Open a police base in Swiss Cottage – As above, we would provide a grant under the Police Act to the Met to facilitate the opening of a police base in Swiss Cottage. This budget is sufficient to open a base in a commercial unit at Swiss Cottage, but there is a suitable location at Swiss Cottage civic centre, which is preferred and would be cheaper.

Fund deployment of forensic anti-burglary smart water across the borough – When more than 50%-55% of homes in an area is signed up to the MetTrace programme using forensic liquid, burglaries can be reduced by over three-quarters. However, the Met has only budgeted to provide 440,000 across London, or just 12% of London homes, which would be insufficient to eradicate burglary. We would provide a grant under the Police Act to distribute liquid more widely and get as much of Camden as possible above 50% saturation, and thus make Camden a burglary-free borough. This programme would be provided for five years.

Give Council Tax Reduction to special constables – Special Constables have the same powers as police officers and are a valuable tool to support officers. They currently receive free travel on London transport, but otherwise no financial incentive, making them a cost-effective part of the force and a means of keeping the police workforce grounded in the Peelian tradition of local civilian policing. We would provide a 50% reduction in Council Tax for special constables. This would both incentivise and promote the scheme, and thus lead to more sign-ups and more policing resources.

Install 10 publicly-accessible defibrillators – Camden has one of the smallest networks of defibrillators in the country, with just one publicly-accessible defibrillator in the entirety of the north of the borough. We would fund their installation at convenient locations. We would further support use of DMC or HRA funds to install them in TRA Halls where appropriate.

Send information packs to residents when they move in – When people move (as detected by new registration for Council Tax), residents would be sent an information pack that would be automatically tailored to their circumstances, and incorporating key information. This would include local amenities to their home, key contacts in the council, their local police contact, when and how to leave out waste, how private tenants can enforce housing rights, and how to download relevant apps and sign up to relevant email mailing lists. The importance of this has been reiterated by the low registration rate with GPs for private tenants – which will likely mean a lower vaccination rate.

Resume postal notifications of planning applications – The ending of postal notifications left residents unable to respond to consultations. The service could be automated and fulfilled through

a commercial mail room to reduce costs. The net cost that could be achieved is £30,000 more than the cost of street signs, which the council has to erect if it does not provide postal notifications and which are often vandalised or removed and generate far fewer responses from relevant neighbours.

Renting out top two floors of 5PS – Much of the prime office space within 5 Pancras Square remains underutilised, and space within it, especially within hotdesking, could be consolidated to create space for a commercial tenant unless and until that space is needed again. In light of Covid, Camden should furthermore conduct an appraisal of further space it does not need to use – and while some businesses need less space, Camden’s offices are in an enviable and expensive location and will be of demand to many.

Use two-thirds of unused (void) parking spaces on estates for paid-for parking and transfer

£500,000 to the Housing Revenue Account – Currently, 2,191 spaces on housing estates are never used: leading to recent proposals by the council to create a presumption in new planning guidance that they be removed in redevelopment. However, unless and until they are, these assets should be used. We would grant a concession to a full parking operator (e.g. JustPark) for two-thirds of the empty spaces, so there remains a surplus of spaces for infrequent use. From the estimated £2,000,000 net income from this, £500,000 would be granted to the Housing Revenue Account for capital investment on estates, e.g. CCTV and electric vehicle charging, although the exact allocation of that is out of scope of the General Fund budget.

Investment in fraud detection – Housing fraud costs Camden £238 per annum per household in the borough. However, Camden recovers just a third as many council houses due to fraud as Southwark does. An increase in Housing Investigations Team resources to detect fraud, recover social housing, and recover Proceeds of Crime would yield millions of pounds in revenue and recovered social housing. It is considered to be revenue neutral in year one, but raise several million a year by the end of the three-year period.

Income from film service to increase by 50% – Camden recoups relatively limited sums from its film service contract compared to other councils. This can be increased significantly, which will furthermore increase the desirability of Camden’s film locations and put more of its neighbourhoods on the map. Covid has reduced the ability to do this, and so the realised increased revenue has been reduced from £105,000 to £40,000 a year, although future years should see this return to that level.

Fix Camden’s website – We would hire a web consultant to address problems with the website, including restoring elements of the Camden website that have been deleted, adding more synonyms to pages’ metadata to aid searching, and ranking pages more clearly so the pages deemed by Camden to be most important come higher up the search results. This would reduce further service delivery costs, although this is not factored in here.

Develop a consolidated Camden app – Camden has at least three apps – Clean Camden for reporting waste, Camden StreetSafe for reporting rough sleeping, Camden Recycling Rewards to encourage recycling – and others, such as RingGo and Libby, that it uses for service delivery. Use of these apps is limited because of the sheer number of them and the lack of any centralised location for them. We would consolidate services where possible into a single app, which would improve take-up. It would eventually also lower service delivery costs, although this is not factored in here.

Shared digital with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea – Camden aimed to share digital services with Haringey and Islington until 2019, before this collapsed due to Camden and their inability to share services. However, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea have had shared digital services for several years, and thus would be able to incorporate Camden. Their digital costs are considerably lower than Camden's, and sharing digital services would save Camden £1.5m a year.

Shared HR, legal, strategy and change, and procurement services with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea – In addition to digital costs, Camden should look to share back office services with boroughs that have done similar. Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea already share HR, legal, strategy and change, and procurement services, and Camden should look to join that arrangement.

Additional reduction in agency and consultancy spend – We would reduce spending on agency and consultancy by 1%, including through the capacity enhancements through other proposed amendments. For example, sharing services with other boroughs creates economies of scale that mean occasional increases in workload can be managed within existing resources without needing agency or consultancy staff.

Reduce spending on Camden's external communication department by 50% – Camden spends more on its external communications department than almost any other council in the country. Given the thriving local press, this is not necessary. Savings of 50% would reduce Camden's expenditure to approximately the level of other London boroughs. There is scope for some of these services to be shared with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea in line with above services.

Reduction in mobile provision for non-frontline staff – In line with many other public sector bodies, such as the NHS, we will introduce a default 'Bring Your Own Device' policy for non-front line staff with mobile phones. This will enable staff to access their email and Office 365 from their own personal phones or tablets, and halve Camden's costs on providing digital devices to its own employees. This mirrors the approach taken by Barnet Council.

Freeze all councillor allowances for one year and reverse previous increase in the Leader and Cabinet's allowances – In this period where so many residents are experiencing economic hardship, we believe that councillors should shoulder some of the burden. Allowances should be frozen for a year – not increased by three times the rate of inflation. We would reverse the recent huge increases to the Leader and Cabinet members' special responsibility allowances.

End funding for trade union facility time – Camden spends more subsidising the internal administration of trade union activities than 94% of councils in England. We would end financial funding for this trade union facility time. This would not affect the performance of trade union duties, which relate to the job (e.g. negotiations, disciplinary matters, training for the trade union role) and are required by law to be paid for (and so not included within facility time, which primarily relates to internal union administration).

Scrap Camden magazine – Camden is fortunate to have two local newspapers and a number of microsites. It has extensive other opportunities for important information to be disseminated. However, its *Pravda* mouthpiece of the Cabinet is still published anyway. Under pressure from Conservative councillors over the last decade to reduce the cost of this newspaper, Camden now

estimates this would not save taxpayers' money, as information would need to be communicated in other ways. We nonetheless believe those alternatives are better, and would support local newspapers, and ensure information was balanced, not just be PR for Camden's political leadership.

End grant to Love Camden – Camden is blessed with among the most media coverage of its culture and events of any area in the world. Not only is a separate website a misuse of taxpayers' money, but it inappropriately competes with local newspapers: undermining their commercial viability. We would end this grant.