

Liberal Democrat Group amendment to the Budget Setting Report 2026/27

Foreword by the Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Last year, Labour made jobs redundant and cut street cleaning, closed public toilets, and reduced enforcement across our city. At the same time, they voted themselves a 55% increase in their Leader's allowance, overriding independent advice. That is who is running Cambridge.

This budget amendment is our answer to that. It starts to reverse the damage done.

The message from residents in this council's own public consultation could not have been clearer: basic council services are the priority and more should be spent on them. Labour heard that message last year. They ignored it. They heard it the year before. They ignored it then too. Their budget this year is nothing so heroic as a U-turn – it is tokenism. The mismatch between what residents want and what Labour delivers remains stubbornly in place.

Street cleaning, anti-social behaviour enforcement, and public toilets are not aspirational luxuries. They are what residents believe they pay their council tax to receive. They are central to a civilised city of which its people can feel proud. Labour cut all three. We are building back all three.

We propose to reopen the Parker's Piece public toilets closed last year – but not simply to turn the clock back. By introducing contactless card payment alongside Radar Key access for disabled people, we address the primary reason their usage and income had been declining in the first place: that in an increasingly cashless city, people couldn't use them unless they happened to have the right change. We propose to apply the same technology to the Quayside toilets, making both financially sustainable for the long term, as the council already plans to do at Silver Street. There is no good reason it has not already been applied here.

We propose to add a new two-person afternoon shift to a street cleaning team that Labour cut by over 20% last year, with entirely predictable consequences. Our amendment enables an additional daily cleaning round after 4pm in the busy city centre – where service currently stops – and increases capacity for non-routine work across the city: fly-tip clearances, graffiti and gum removal, street bin cleaning and jet spraying. This will be further supported by the ongoing bin round optimisation exercise.

We propose to restore two Public Realm Enforcement positions made redundant last year. These officers

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enforce regulations including those on littering, abuse of open spaces, fly-tipping, dog control, obstructive A-boards, moorings, and punt touting. Their loss has reduced the service to a primarily reactive, request-driven operation with programmed patrols across the city largely abandoned. The visible deterrent effect has gone. The potential for preventative action has gone. The council's eyes and ears on the streets have gone. The costs of that – in anti-social behaviour and in the quality of life of Cambridge residents – are already being felt.

Without these changes, the council is accepting lower standards and storing up greater problems.

The improvements we propose will be funded through the simple mechanism of returning councillor allowances to what the Independent Remuneration Panel actually recommended last year – indexed for inflation – and by ensuring car parking charges keep pace with the retail prices index rather than rising by less.

Our amendment proves that even in genuinely challenging times, a council does not have to break the bank to respect its residents' priorities. It simply has to listen to them – and to order its affairs with their interests, rather than its own, coming first.

Councillor Jamie Dalzell, Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Foreword by the Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing

The administration's management of the council housing it provides has shown for many years the same disregard for the basic expectations of its tenants that the General Fund does to the wider public.

We will support the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2026/27 because the proposed investments in building safety, stock condition, and damp remediation are not optional: they are critical to the health and safety of our tenants. However, this budget is a stark admission that previous financial plans were detached from operational reality. It serves as an emergency rescue package to fix a structural deficit that has been allowed to drift for a decade.

For years, we have proposed proactive investments in responsive repairs, void management, and dedicated staff to tackle damp, mould, and condensation. These proposals were consistently rejected under the premise that existing resources were sufficient. Now, driven by the force of new national legislation, regulatory pressure, and spiralling void costs, the council is forced to budget an additional £750,000 annually to manage damp and mould, alongside further substantial sums for disrepair compensation. This short-sighted approach has cost the council heavily in financial terms and failed tenants who have had to endure poor living conditions in the interim.

We welcome that the administration's capital programme matches the scale of ambition we tabled as far back as 2019, when we proposed dedicated resources to accelerate the delivery of 1,000 new council homes beyond the initial devolution grant. We remain fully committed to expanding the city's housing supply and support the capital provisions in this budget, but maintain that new development cannot come at the expense of letting existing stock deteriorate.

We must also highlight the underlying financial fragility of the HRA. The capital programme is reliant on the receipt of unconfirmed government grants, and the government's delay of rent convergence until April 2027 creates a significant, unexpected pressure on the coming year's finances. The HRA's Interest Cover Ratio is projected to drop dangerously close to the minimum prudent level in the mid-2030s, leaving the housing budget with virtually no margin for error.

Finally, while we support the necessary financial appropriations in this budget, we must also reform the operational culture. From within existing budget lines, we would immediately overhaul how the housing service interacts with residents. We urgently need an effective, respectful access policy to ensure property assessment and maintenance can be delivered efficiently. Crucially, we would implement more flexible working hours for the repairs service, ensuring that appointments fit around tenants' lives and working hours, rather than dictating to them. It is time for a housing service that is genuinely responsive to the people it

serves.

Councillor Anthony Martinelli, Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing

Background

The council's draft Budget Setting Report 2026/27 was published on 18 February 2026. In line with the council's constitution this sets out the recommendations of the Cabinet, and will be subject to consideration by Full Council at its meeting on 26 February 2026.

The Liberal Democrat Group wish to add several budget proposals as set out within this amendment paper. The detailed proposals can be seen at Annexe A.

In order to enact these additional proposals, the Liberal Democrat Group propose a number of amendments to the Cabinet recommendations in respect of the Budget Setting Report 2026/27, as set out at Annexe C.

Impact of Liberal Democrat Group proposals

The table below sets out the impact on the council's five-year savings requirement in the General Fund should the Liberal Democrat Group proposals be accepted in full:-

General Fund savings requirements (£m)	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Net savings requirement – new each year (draft Budget Setting Report)	-	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.248
Net savings requirement – cumulative (draft Budget Setting Report)	-	0.375	0.750	1.125	1.373
New revenue bids	0.276	0.276	0.251	0.251	0.251
New savings and increased income	(0.199)	(0.199)	(0.199)	(0.199)	(0.199)
New capital bids funded from revenue resources	0.025	-	-	-	-
Total net pressure/(savings)	0.102	0.077	0.052	0.052	0.052
Use of General Fund reserves to fund proposals	(0.050)	(0.025)	-	-	-
Contributions to / (from) reserves to smooth current savings target	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.052)	-
Total changes to savings requirements	-	-	-	-	0.052
Revised net savings requirement – cumulative	-	0.375	0.750	1.125	1.425
Revised net savings requirement – new each year	-	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.300

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As shown above, the proposals would result in a slight increase to the council's five-year savings target of £52,000, to £1.425 million. The proposals would also result in an additional use of General Fund reserves totalling £283,000 over the next four years.

The impact of the proposals on General Fund reserve levels over the next five years is set out in the table below:-

General Fund reserve projection (£m)	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Balance at 1 April	18.863	14.381	12.379	11.605	11.964	11.980
Net transfer to Transformation and Reinvestment Fund	(1.754)	-	-	-	-	-
Transfer to Greater Cambridge Impact Fund Reserve	(0.800)	-	-	-	-	-
Planned use of reserve to fund one-off Folk Festival proposal	(0.075)	-	-	-	-	-
Forecast use of reserve to balance budget in-year – draft Budget Setting Report	(5.531)	1.600	(0.697)	0.411	0.068	-
Use of reserve to finance historic capital expenditure	(5.837)	-	-	-	-	-
Transfer to Local Government Reorganisation Reserve	-	(2.500)	-	-	-	-
Transfer to Civic Quarter Development Reserve	-	(1.000)	-	-	-	-
Current year business rates growth	9.515	-	-	-	-	-
Additional use of reserves in respect of Liberal Democrat Group amendments	-	(0.102)	(0.077)	(0.052)	(0.052)	-
Balance at 31 March before future business rates growth	14.381	12.379	11.605	11.964	11.980	11.980
Indicative future business rates growth (at risk)	-	0.217	1.160	1.999	0.230	1.223
Balance at 31 March including future business rates growth	14.381	12.596	12.982	15.340	15.586	16.809

The target level for General Fund reserves as advised by the council's Section 151 Officer is currently £9.671

million. Allowing for future inflation, the target level is anticipated to be around £10.530 million by 2030/31. The table above demonstrates that, should the Liberal Democrat Group proposals be adopted in full, reserves would remain above this projected target level in each of the next five years.

Equalities Impact Assessment

Where relevant, the equalities impacts of the Liberal Democrat Group proposals have been considered and are set out at Annexe B.

Report by the Section 151 Officer

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the council's Section 151 Officer to report to the council when it is considering its budget requirement and consequent Council Tax setting. The report must deal with the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the reserves allowed for in the budget proposals. The Section 25 report is included at section 11 of the Budget Setting Report 2026/27.

I confirm that the amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group, as set out within this amendment paper, would not require any changes to my section 25 report.

Jody Etherington, Section 151 Officer

Annexe A – Liberal Democrat General Fund proposals

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2026/27 Budget – GF Proposals – by Type

Reference	Item Description	2026/27 Budget £	2027/28 Budget £	2028/29 Budget £	2029/30 Budget £	2030/31 Budget £	Climate Rating	Contact
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Revenue bids

City Services

LDG2601	Reopening of Parker's Piece public toilets	25,000	25,000	-	-	-	Negative / Low impact	Don Blair
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Having been closed based on usage data which was heavily impacted by availability of access only by coins, prior to COVID-19 these public toilets were heavily used and clearly provided an important service. They will be reopened immediately, incurring the full cost of cleaning and maintenance which will be initially budgeted for two years. During this time, reader access for bank cards will be installed with the intention of defraying these costs partly or completely (see separate capital proposal LDG2602). A report to members will then be brought forward after a short bedding-in period to allow a decision on the future of the toilets from 2028-29 onwards.

LDG2603	Improvement of street cleaning services	150,000	150,000	150,000	150,000	150,000	Nil	Don Blair
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Following the recent restructuring, gaps have emerged both in routine attention to the city centre after 4pm and the achievement of programmed periodic work across the city. Subject to further experimentation and refinement by operational management, a new two-person shift working 12.00-19.00 within the existing 7 day week shift rota will be added, involving the appointment of 4 additional staff. Staff will be deployed across the city from 12.00-16.00 to support programmed bin cleaning, jet spraying, removal of fly tips and graffiti; and from 16.00-19.00 to provide an additional bin and cleaning round, leaving the city clear before the night economy begins.

Communities

LDG2604	Reorientation of Public Realm Enforcement	101,000	101,000	101,000	101,000	101,000	Nil	Yvonne O'Donnell
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Since the recent restructuring the reduced number of Public Realm Enforcement Officers have become a primarily reactive resource with field visits mainly being driven by service requests from colleagues and the public. The appointment of two additional officers will reinforce their collective capacity for a programmed preventative mode of operation across the city, including a strengthened presence at the pressure points of the city centre and seasonal weekends. This will enable the council's agreed policies across a wide range of environmental anti-social behaviour to be more systematically monitored and deterred.

Total revenue bids	276,000	276,000	251,000	251,000	251,000
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Total pressures and bids	276,000	276,000	251,000	251,000	251,000
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2026/27 Budget – GF Proposals – by Type
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Reference	Item Description	2026/27 Budget £	2027/28 Budget £	2028/29 Budget £	2029/30 Budget £	2030/31 Budget £	Climate Rating	Contact
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Savings

Chief Executive Office

LDG2605	Members' allowances	(46,000)	(46,000)	(46,000)	(46,000)	(46,000)	Nil	Dan Kalley
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The members' allowances scheme will be aligned with the 2025 recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel. This will result in ongoing savings from a reduction in the Leader's allowance, and a limit of one internal and one external special responsibility allowance per member.

Total savings		(46,000)	(46,000)	(46,000)	(46,000)	(46,000)		
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2026/27 Budget – GF Proposals – by Type
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Reference	Item Description	2026/27 Budget £	2027/28 Budget £	2028/29 Budget £	2029/30 Budget £	2030/31 Budget £	Climate Rating	Contact
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Increased income**City Services**

LDG2606	Car park income	(153,000)	(153,000)	(153,000)	(153,000)	(153,000)	Nil	Daniel Morgan
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The proposals set out in the Budget Setting Report 2026/27 would see daytime car parking charges at the Grand Arcade, Park Street and Grafton Centre car parks increase by between 1.0% and 3.3%, with most increases below the current annual rate of inflation. This bid would see these charges increased instead by an average of 4.5%, representing the September 2025 Retail Price Index (RPI).

Total increased income	(153,000)	(153,000)	(153,000)	(153,000)	(153,000)
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Total savings and increased income	(199,000)	(199,000)	(199,000)	(199,000)	(199,000)
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Total revenue proposals	77,000	77,000	52,000	52,000	52,000
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2026/27 Budget – GF Proposals – by Type
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Reference	Item Description	2026/27 Budget £	2027/28 Budget £	2028/29 Budget £	2029/30 Budget £	2030/31 Budget £	Climate Rating	Contact
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Capital bids**City Services**

LDG2602	Bank card readers at public toilets	25,000	-	-	-	-	Nil	Don Blair
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Cashless access is recognised as essential to the long-term viability of pay-to-enter public toilets in high footfall locations. This bid will provide for installation of bank card readers at Parker’s Piece and Quayside public toilets to enable access and support continued operation beyond 2027/28 on a financially sustainable basis. This is linked to revenue bids B5479 and LDG2601, and would be funded from revenue reserves.

Total capital bids	25,000	-	-	-	-	-		
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Annexe B – Equality impacts

Reopening of Parker's Piece public toilets

This would have a positive impact for residents and visitors to Cambridge utilising Parker's Piece, either at an organised event (such as the Country Fair or Winter Wonderland) or using the space generally. Whilst there are public houses, hotels and shops close by that have toilets, these tend to just be available for their customers. By carrying out regular maintenance and cleaning it would ensure that the facilities meet the public's expectations of public toilets and comply with health and safety standards.

The re-opening of the toilets on Parkers Piece would especially have a positive impact on:-

- People with disabilities who might have conditions that cause incontinence and require them to need to use the toilet more often, or who have mobility disabilities and are unable to get to alternative toilet provision.
- Older people as aging can bring about physical changes like reduced bladder capacity and conditions like incontinence. These factors make the availability of public toilets critical for older adults.
- Pregnant women who often need to go to the toilet more frequently as a result of hormonal changes and physical changes, such as the growing uterus putting pressure on the bladder.
- Parents of babies and toddlers who may need access to baby changing facilities.

Improvement of street cleaning services

This would have a positive impact for residents and visitors to Cambridge by removing litter, rubbish, fly tipping etc. This would improve accessibility of the street scene in the evenings, especially having a positive impact on:-

- People with disabilities who may have mobility impairments or visual impairments so be at risk of trip hazards or need a space clear of rubbish and so on for access via wheelchairs or mobility scooters.
- Older people who might be more likely to have mobility or sight impairments, as likelihood increases with age.
- Pregnant women and parents of babies, toddlers, and young children pushing prams who may

be at risk of trip hazards or need a space clear of rubbish and so on for access.

Reorientation of public realm enforcement

This would have a positive impact for residents and visitors to Cambridge through reinforcing the team's collective capacity for a programmed preventative mode of operation across the city, including a strengthened presence at the pressure points of the city centre and seasonal weekends with activities including enforcement of regulations regarding A-boards and external cafe seating. The increased visibility would also have an impact on tackling issues such as pickpocketing, fake charity fundraisers and street vendors, having a positive impact on:-

- All communities, especially those who experience hate crime and/or harassment due to their protected characteristics including women, people with disabilities, members of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities, people who are transgender and non-binary people, people of faith (Jewish, Muslim, Sikh etc), and people from ethnic communities including the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community.
- Disabled people by improving enforcement that makes spaces more accessible. This would especially be of benefit to people needing to use wheelchairs and mobility scooters, and people who generally have mobility impairments and/or visual impairments. Improving ability to enforce regulations on A-boards and café seating will also improve accessibility for people needing to use pushchairs or prams.

Bank card readers at public toilets

Cashless access to toilets may have a negative impact on people who experience digital inclusion and/or bank accounts, which especially impacts on people experiencing poverty. Moreover, older people may be more likely to experience digital exclusion so not have access to smartphones.

The accessible toilet will continue to be free as it is accessed via a Radar Key.

Car park income

This would have negative impacts on groups such as:

- Older people who might rely on car parks for access to services because likelihood of disability increases with age so they might be more likely to have mobility issues. Those above retirement age though do have the benefit of a subsidised public transport scheme which could help mitigate the impact.

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- Families with children who may require convenient parking close to the city to access schools. An increase in fees might encourage people to use alternative modes of transport, which may be less convenient for them.
- Disabled people. Those who are blue badge holders have access to accessible parking, and increased costs associated with the rise in car park charges are mitigated by the 3 hours of free parking offer. However, not all disabled people are eligible for a blue badge and disabled people are more likely to experience poverty (in part due to increased general living costs associated with having a disability). This means disabled people might be disproportionately impacted by the increase in charges.
- Unpaid carers, 59% of whom are women. People with caring responsibilities make a higher number of trips making car travel more convenient, which might mean that increasing charges might disproportionately impact on this group. Whilst the person they care for may have a blue badge, this can only be used when the person is with them.
- People experiencing poverty who are less likely to own cars. Those on lower incomes who own cars and who have to use car parks might have disproportionate negative impacts.

Annexe C – Proposed amendments to recommendations

It is proposed that the recommendations to Full Council in respect of the Budget Setting Report 2026/27 are amended as follows:-

- h) Approve the General Fund revenue proposals shown at Appendix E, together with the additional proposals LDG2601, LDG2603, LDG2604, LDG2605 and LDG2606 set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment.
- j) Approve the General Fund capital proposals set out at Appendix F(a), together with additional proposal LDG2602 set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment, and the revised General Fund capital plan set out at Appendix F(c) as amended by proposal LDG2602.
- l) Approve the proposed capital financing plans set out at section 5 (General Fund) and section 7 (Housing Revenue Account) of the Budget Setting Report 2026/27, as amended by proposal LDG2602, whilst noting that the constitution delegates all executive decisions on borrowing, investment or financing to the Chief Finance Officer, who is required to act in accordance with CIPFA's Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Local Authorities.
- o) Note the impact of the Budget Setting Report 2026/27 on General Fund and Housing Revenue Account reserves, as set out at section 8 of the Report and amended by the additional proposals set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment.
- r) Approve the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account as set out at section 9 of the Budget Setting Report 2026/27 and amended by the additional proposals set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment.
- t) Approve the Capital Strategy attached at Appendix O as amended by the additional proposals set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment.
- u) Approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 at Appendix P, including the prudential and treasury management indicators set out at Annexe C, as amended by the additional proposals set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment.
- aa) Note the Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in respect of budget proposals in the General Fund (Appendix S(a)) and Housing Revenue Account (Appendix S(b)), together with the equality impacts of the additional proposals as set out in the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment.
- bb) Approve the schedule of proposed fees and charges for 2026/27 set out at Appendix T(a) and

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confidential Appendix T(b), and delegate authority to the Director of City Services to amend car parking charges in respect of the Grand Arcade, Park Street and Grafton Centre car parks in order to achieve the additional income set out at proposal LDG2606.