

UK: Salford's Labour council imposes cuts of almost £100 million

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The 2012/13 budget of the Labour-controlled Salford City Council, located in Greater Manchester in the North West of England, contains spending cuts of £24 million. These follow cuts of £40 million carried out in last year's budget.

From 2011 to 2015, a total of £94 million is to be cut from its spending budget. This includes 1,000 job losses, a tenth of the workforce. The cuts to services are being implemented following an overall cut in Salford's budget by central government. Salford is among the first local authorities to pass an austerity budget this year, with councils throughout the UK set to follow suit.

Four hundred jobs are on the chopping block this year, 230 more than expected. They include 40 vacant posts that will not be filled. The council's request for 360 voluntary redundancies has not yet been met and compulsory job losses have not been ruled out.

Children's Services are to face cuts of £2.6 million. This includes £350,000 slashed from training for social workers, who will now only receive statutory training. The youth service is to lose £990,000 from its budget and there are cuts of £400,000 to the city's leisure centres.

The council is proposing to partially privatise the Intensive and Intermediate Home Care Support Service, where 30 jobs are to go. This offers support to the terminally ill, mothers who are experiencing problems after giving birth and people who need care after leaving hospital.

Nearly £2 million will be slashed from Adult Social Care. The elderly in care homes will be subject to increased costs. Up to 300 elderly care home residents face contributions of £2 per week for accessing the council-run benefits and assessment service and £201,000 will be cut from the Help for Carers Services.

Welfare Rights and Debt Advice services are to be cut by £396,000.

Prestige capital projects around the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) north of England base at the newly created Media City UK at Salford Quays face cuts of around £1 million.

The city is already renowned for its poverty and urban decay. Officially unemployment is at 5.2 percent, but some areas of the city have rates of as high as 40 percent. A Child Poverty report found that in certain areas of the city, up to 60 percent of children were living in poverty. Salford has the second highest child poverty rate in Greater Manchester and is among the worst 10 percent of local authorities nationally.

Council tenants in Salix Homes, which manages 10,500 properties across Central Salford and the Beechfarm and Rainsough Brow estates, face a rent increase of 7.62 percent (£5.21) per week.

Cuts of £876,000 to day care centres over two years were proposed, threatening the closure of several centres. Due to public resistance, the centres and Special Needs Support Services for deaf children were given a short-term reprieve in the 2012/13 budget "whilst a review takes place".

The reprieve was hailed by the public sector trade union Unison as a victory, but is in reality an attempt by the Labour council and Unison to cover up their own role in the massive cuts taking place across the board. Steven North, the branch secretary of Salford City Unison and a member of the Socialist Party, claimed, "It is a great achievement for all those who believe that services for vulnerable people should be protected".

Fully aware that such services remain threatened with imminent closure, he was forced to add, "We are still looking for longer-term guarantees around the future of

day services for the elderly and those with learning disabilities”.

Labour Party leader of the council John Merry stated, “I know that this has been a difficult time and I am sure that you will be cascading the good news around your areas.”

As this year’s budget passed, Unison mounted a tiny token protest outside the council chamber building. As the largest public sector trade union, it has played the pivotal role in allowing tens of thousands of jobs to be cut nationally in the wake of the £130 billion in cuts pushed through by the previous Labour government and current Conservative/Liberal coalition.

Unison has also sought to use the finance spent by the council on cultural projects and the £1 billion that the BBC has invested in Media City UK in order to divert from a unified struggle by workers against the council in opposition to all cuts.

Media City is part of a major regeneration plan of the once thriving docks that, before their closure in the 1980s, provided thousands of secure jobs. It was sold to Salford residents as an investment that would create thousands of jobs. The reality is very different. A *Guardian* report last month revealed that out of 3,127 applicants from Salford, only 24 were employed. Of these, eight were employed on six-month minimum wage contracts as “meet and greet ambassadors”. An article in the *Financial Times* commented, “Just yards from Media City is the Ordsall estate where unemployment and deprivation is rife.”

Salford was one of the cities in which working class youth rioted last August as a result of the deprivation and grinding poverty they experience daily. The Labour Council, local Labour MP Hazel Blears and Unison joined forces in condemning the rioters. In a letter to Merry, Steven North stated, “We do not support the actions of those who caused the unrest on Tuesday night,” adding, “The riots caused our members disruption in their communities, fear in their homes and could have placed them in danger.”

This stance by Unison and the Socialist Party has served to justify police and judicial repression of working class youth. Many who took part in the rebellion have received custodial sentences. One young man, Zak Challinor, who has a young daughter, received a five-and-a-half year prison sentence, the longest received by anyone involved in the rioting

nationally. Salford is among a number of inner-city councils who have since served Notices for Possession of council properties to tenants in a form of collective punishment. So far five notices have been served.

While services and jobs are being decimated, Peel Holdings, one of the leading infrastructure, transport and real estate companies in the UK with assets over £5 billion, are to receive £15 million from the council towards its Port Salford Project.

The fight by workers to defend their jobs and livelihoods in Salford, as in towns and cities nationally, requires the building of new independent organisations of struggle, uniting all sections of the working class and youth.



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