

# Second round of UK local government cuts under way

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Hundreds of millions of pounds in spending cuts are being passed by local authorities throughout the UK.

The 2012/2013 budgets will lead to tens of thousands of job losses and the destruction of vitally needed public services.

In October 2010, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition cut local council budgets by 28 percent, with a reduction in spending of 7.1 percent in local government funding each year until 2014.

Consequently, according to the Office of National Statistics, public sector employment in the UK dropped by 4.4 percent over the year ending last September, with a loss of 269,000 jobs. In local government, it fell by 6.7 percent, or 195,000 jobs, making up the lion's share of the total.

The latest cuts build on this. Councils that have already passed an austerity budget include:

- Labour Party-run Lambeth, in London, has imposed £29 million in cuts, including £6 million to youth services. Ten percent of Lambeth's cuts target services for the disabled. In Lewisham, £23 million in cuts were passed; in Southwark, £18 million; in Brent, £14 million—part of £104 million expected to be cut by 2014.

- The UK's second largest city, Birmingham, which is run by a Conservative/Liberal coalition, is imposing £100 million in spending cuts this year.

- The Labour council leadership in Sheffield has agreed £55 million in cuts, including the loss of 550 staff. A full meeting of the council on March 9 is expected to pass the proposal.

- The ten councils that make up the metropolitan county of Greater Manchester are imposing cuts of nearly £133 million. In Labour-controlled Salford, spending cuts of £24 million follow cuts of £40 million last year. 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. Last year, Manchester City Council imposed cuts of £170 million to be carried out over two years, with the loss of around 2,000 jobs and the slashing of many services. A further £80 million in budget cuts are expected in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015.

- Three local authorities in Yorkshire, England, have passed budgets imposing £115 million in cuts. Leeds, run by a Labour-led coalition, passed cuts of £55.4 million, with 400 of the 2,500 jobs to go by 2015. In Rotherham, £20.4 million in cuts were passed, including 200 job losses; in Kirklees, £40 million in cuts with 680 redundancies.

- Conservative-run Nottinghamshire County Council plans to implement £180 million cuts over the next three years. The council has already shed 2,500 jobs. Labour-run Nottingham City Council approved budget cuts for the forthcoming year of £20 million, with 195 job losses.

- In Bristol, the Liberal Democrat-run council voted through £27 million cuts to services, including 350 job losses. The council plans to cut spending by a total of £70 million by 2014.

- At Southampton City Council, the ruling Conservative group passed cuts of nearly £14 million, including 200 job losses.

- In St. Helens in Merseyside, with a population of just over 100,000, the Labour-run council voted through £8 million in cuts, as well as a 2 percent increase in local council taxation. This follows cuts last year of £28.1 million and the loss of 741 jobs. A total of £50 million is set to be cut by 2015.

The Green Party, which has postured as an anti-cuts party, has passed an austerity budget in the city of Brighton, the one council it runs in the UK. The budget

involves £17 million in cuts and a proposed 3.5 percent increase to council tax. This measure was voted down by Labour and the Conservatives councillors. All three parties then united to pass the overall budget by a majority of 53-1, including 22 of the 23 Green councillors.

The *Independent* commented, “Coming on the eve of the [Green] party’s spring conference in Liverpool, the budget vote will be a major milestone in the party’s coming of age. Having picked up plenty of middle-class, left-leaning, eco-friendly support, they are now being tested to take tough decisions.”

The Brighton local *Argus* newspaper commented, “For thousands, that means no job, little hope and limited income. And the group of politicians at the head of it will be Green.”

The Greens’ Irish counterparts, in a coalition with Fianna Fáil, imposed four consecutive austerity budgets between 2008 and 2011—reducing public spending by 16 percent of GDP, or €25 billion.

These cuts are just the tip of the iceberg. In a recent study, the Institute for Fiscal Studies warned that more than 80 percent of the government’s overall cuts had yet to take effect.

Ahead of this month’s budget, the government is making plans to slash billions more from spending. Last month, Andrew Tyrie, the Conservative chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, called on Chancellor George Osborne to use the budget to announce that the government intends to bring public spending down to 40 percent of GDP. Public spending is currently around 43 percent of GDP.

Conservative MP David Ruffley, who also sits on the Treasury committee, declared, “I think there’s a lot of fat still to be pruned”.

That these brutal measures can be carried out is due to the pivotal role of the trade unions in demobilising all opposition to the cuts. When the Conservative/Liberal coalition came to power in 2010, the unions did nothing to oppose the austerity programme, just as they worked hand in glove with the previous Labour government to enforce huge cuts in the aftermath of the 2008 £1 trillion bailout of the banks and super-rich.

As the destruction of vitally needed public services accelerates, alongside the loss of hundreds of thousands of local authority jobs, the unions have organised no

national campaign to oppose anything. Instead, the most threadbare local campaigns have been mounted, organised with a few trade union activists, comprising mainly members of the pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party, standing outside town halls as budgets are passed.

Unison, the main public sector trade unions, with 1.3 million members nationally, does not even refer to the latest round of devastating council cuts out on its web site.



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