

UK local authorities plan more than a billion pounds in cuts

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Local Authorities throughout the UK are planning more than a billion pounds in further cuts to be imposed from next year. The cuts will eliminate thousands of jobs and wreck what remains of vitally needed social services.

In Birmingham, the Labour Party-run council (the UK's largest) is to hike up the £70 million cuts planned for 2013 by another £40 million. This £110 million cut will lead to an estimated 900 job losses on top of the 4,000 full-time jobs that have already gone since 2010. Some £33 million is being slashed from next year's adult services department, used by the disabled, the elderly and other vulnerable people and £24 million from the children and young people's budget.

This is the tip of the iceberg. All told the council is to cut a massive £600 million from its budget by 2017. This equates to nearly 50 percent of the discretionary spending that Birmingham City Council had before the 2008 global financial meltdown. It equates to taking nearly £560 from every man, woman and child in the second largest city in the UK.

Council leader Sir Albert Bore said, "There are no services from the city council which aren't going to be affected one way or another."

Every major city and town in the UK is carrying out similar devastating cuts.

In the first two years of austerity, 15,000 jobs have been slashed by Greater Manchester's councils, serving a population of more than 2.6 million in two cities and eight metropolitan boroughs. In the Labour-run city of Manchester a further 700 to 900 full-time posts are set to go in 2013 as part of cuts of around £80 million. This is less than two years after 2,000 jobs (nearly one in five of total staff) were cut in the city. Were 900 jobs to be lost, it would equate to 12 percent of the existing workforce.

In adjacent Salford a further £25 million in cuts is set to be announced.

Leeds, West Yorkshire, is controlled by the Labour Party, and a further £51 million is to be slashed from the council's budget. More than half of the cuts will be from children's services and adult social care budgets. Nursery charges for subsidised childcare provision in children's centres will increase by £2 per day, equating to £520 a year for working parents.

Sheffield City Council in South Yorkshire is set to shed 600 jobs as part of £50 million in cuts. Over the past two years the Labour-controlled council has shed 1,400 jobs and imposed £130 million in cuts. Every household in the city has suffered cuts equal to £280. As part of the cuts £3.5 million will be cut from Sheffield's 36 children's centres next year, including 50 job losses.

The Labour council in Newcastle, in the north east of England, plans to impose further cuts of around £90 million with more than 1,300 jobs to go. Among the services hit will be the majority of the city's libraries, with just one exempted from closure. Most swimming pools will close as well as Sure Start centres, which provide free or cheap facilities and services for young children and their parents. The council is cutting its entire arts budget of £1.6 million.

As a result of Chancellor George Osborne's autumn statement last week, millions more in austerity cuts will be imposed nationally. It is estimated that the extra 2 percent cut in budgets that councils receive from central government, will result in additional cuts in Newcastle of up to £7 million over the next two years.

Cuts are hitting the most deprived and predominately working class areas. According to official government figures, councils in northern, urban cities and London boroughs with high levels of deprivation have seen

their budgets slashed by almost 10 times the amount lost by mostly Conservative-administered authorities in rural southern England.

In Scotland, the Scottish National Party government is planning to reduce public spending by around 18 percent in real terms by 2016/2017.

North Lanarkshire Council, Scotland's fourth largest local authority serving a population of 326,400, has announced cuts of £73.3 million and outlined potential savings of £105 million. Some 1,387 jobs, from the council's overall workforce of over 13,500 people, would be axed if all its plans were imposed.

Glasgow City Council, also Labour controlled, is looking to cut another 1,000 jobs this year on top of 3,000 lost since 2010 as part of £50 million in cuts. Extrapolated across Scotland, this level of cuts threatens 50,000 workers' jobs and all those dependent on vital council services.

Massive cuts are being prepared across councils in Wales. As a result of the autumn statement, the Welsh government's capital and revenue budget will be 39 percent lower in real terms in 2014-2015 than it was in 2009-2010. Over the past two years, 4,500 jobs have already gone at councils in Wales. Steve Thomas, chief executive of the Welsh Local Government Association, representing 22 local authorities, said, "The real bad stuff is yet to come and a lot of that will start next April when council benefit is cut for 330,000 people across Wales who will see their income drop significantly."

Despite massive opposition to the elimination of thousands of workers' jobs and the destruction of vital services, the coalition government has been able to impose its £155 billion austerity programme. This has only been possible due to the collaboration of the Labour Party, which initiated cuts before it left office in 2010 and which controls the vast majority of local councils in Britain's main urban centres. It is aided in this by its partners in the trade unions, who have not lifted a finger in opposition.

Unison, the UK's main public sector union, has worked with councils to manage the imposition of cuts through mainly voluntary redundancy agreements. The policy of no "compulsory redundancies" fits hand in glove with the agenda of councils throughout the UK who have been able to ram through well over 150,000 jobs losses since 2010. STV Local reported that "only three out of 750 posts which were removed by the local

authority in 2010 as part of a £55 million savings drive were done on a compulsory basis."

In Manchester just 7,555 staff are employed by the council and all will be offered a voluntary severance package. Those aged over 55 who are members of the local government pension scheme will be offered voluntary early retirement.



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