

Chancellor must reverse cuts to local authorities in spending review, Greens warn



24 November 2020

The Chancellor must reverse the decade-long cuts and hand greater control over taxes to local authorities in the Autumn Spending Review on Wednesday, the Green Party has urged.

Ahead of Rishi Sunak's announcement on Wednesday [November 25], the Greens have highlighted how the centralisation of power and funding has hampered the country's response to the coronavirus and climate crises.

Phélim Mac Cafferty, Green Party leader of Brighton and Hove Council, said:

"The repeated failures of the Conservative government throughout the pandemic have made it clear it is local councils which are effectively responding on the ground to their communities.

"From running effective test and trace services, to providing food and personal protective equipment (PPE), councils have risen to the challenge where national government policy, and outsourcing to private contractors, have clearly failed.

"Despite this, years of cuts to public services have now left many councils on the brink. Councils have lost one in two pounds in real-terms since relentless Conservative government cuts began in 2010. News that Croydon council filed for bankruptcy only weeks ago should come as a warning to Conservative ministers that public services are at breaking point – precisely at the point when they are needed most.

"From adult social care to children's services, libraries and public health, the Covid-19 pandemic has underlined that for many these services are a lifeline. It's also at a local level that real change is happening on critical issues like the climate emergency and the crisis in housing and homelessness. With proper funding, councils can continue to lead the way, but cuts hold our communities back.

"To steer us through this crisis we don't just need emergency cash bungs, we need a complete rethink of how funding is provided to local communities, so they can not only survive but thrive in the world beyond Covid-19. Councils haven't yet been offered 'more' money, they have been handed a sticking plaster for a broken bone.

"While we call for the greatest possible recognition of local public services in the spending review, we know that a decade of cuts to local services are not going to be swept away overnight. Most of all, it's high time that the

government put trust in our local communities and public services, who after years of cuts, deserve nothing less than genuine investment.”

Local authorities have seen a reduction in core funding of almost £16 billion over the last decade [1]. It has now been estimated that councils face a £2bn gap between the funding provided and the pressures faced as a result of Covid. [2]

At the same time, local authorities in England have extremely limited power to raise revenue compared to other countries. In 2014 every other G7 national collected more taxes at either a local or regional level.[3]

Green Party deputy leader Amelia Womack said:

“Over the past decade this government has done everything it can to undermine local authorities and concentrate power in Downing Street.

“We have now seen the disastrous impact this has had on our health, wellbeing and local economies.

“It is time for government to recognise just how damaging this approach is and start to reverse the huge cuts it has made to local authority budgets since 2010.

“From developing renewables and making homes energy efficient to building an effective test and trace system, it is local councils that know what their areas need and how to communicate with their communities.

“That’s why we are urging the Chancellor to restore council funding to sustainable levels that will protect communities and frontline services, fulfil the government’s guarantee to reimburse all Covid-related spending and announce a review into the balance of taxation between national and local government.”

ENDS

Notes

1

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.40_01_Finance%20publication_WEB_0.pdf

2

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15041>

3

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/tax-and-devolution>

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[Greens call for end to UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia ahead of G20 summit](#)



20 November 2020

The Green Party of England and Wales and the Scottish Greens have condemned UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia ahead of the G20 leaders' summit hosted by Riyadh this weekend.

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, said:

"The UK government is trying to sell itself as 'Global Britain', yet the best it seems to be able to come up with is selling arms to human rights abusers.

"It is a stain on our national conscience that rather than dedicating our resources to solving the world's biggest crises, this government prefers to brag about developing and selling weapons that are used to harm thousands of innocent civilians.

"It is time the UK government stopped its dirty deals with potential war criminals and showed some true leadership on the world stage by properly addressing climate change and the global pandemic."

Earlier this year the UK government announced it was to resume selling arms to Saudi Arabia, despite these exports having been found to be illegal because they were used to commit war crimes in Yemen. [1]

Recent figures from Oxfam suggest the UK licensed \$5.4 billion of arms sales to Saudi Arabia between 2015 and 2020 – more than four times the amount of aid it has given to Yemen in the same period.[2]

Following the UK's announcement of a further £16.5bn in defence spending yesterday [Thursday 19 November], the Greens have warned the move will fail to address the country's biggest security threats and should instead be spent on tackling the climate, health and economic emergencies we are currently facing. [3]

Ross Greer MSP, Scottish Greens international affairs spokesperson, said:

"Compared to the meagre £4bn spent on a speculative climate wish list, the whopping £16.5bn Boris Johnson is throwing at defence spending is absolutely ridiculous in itself, never mind the fact he announced it on the eve of a G20 summit hosted by a regime that uses British-made bombs to kill children.

“This spending imbalance needs to be redressed to tackle the real threat to our survival, the climate emergency. Instead of throwing more money at weapons and arms dealers, why not create quality manufacturing jobs in the industries which actually benefit our country and the world, like the domestic supply chain for the wind farms that will be going up at a rapid rate off our coasts?”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/britain-arms-sell-saudi-arabia-military-exports-a9605636.html>

2

https://oxfamapps.org/media/press_release/g20-arms-exports-to-saudi-arabia-worth-three-times-aid-to-yemen-since-2015/

3

<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2020/11/19/greens-warn-defence-budget-increase-fails-to-address-biggest-threats-to-our-security/>

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[Greens call out “rank hypocrisy” of threats to freeze public-sector pay](#)



20 November 2020

The Green Party has accused government ministers of “rank hypocrisy” for threatening to freeze the pay of millions of public sector workers just months after standing on their doorsteps to applaud them.

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley said:

“During this pandemic the country at large has shown its appreciation for the hard work and dedication of our key workers. It is rank hypocrisy for Tory ministers who were clapping for these heroes of the Covid crisis on their

doorsteps to now freeze their pay.

“I agree wholeheartedly with Frances O’Grady in her call for a pay rise as a reward for their service rather than suffering what is, in effect, a pay cut.

“This callous Tory government appears to have learned nothing from the disaster that ten years of austerity caused both to our vital public services and our regional economies.

“A pay freeze now will further entrench the hardship that people across this country are facing.”

ENDS

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[Greens welcome right to scrap First Past the Post in Welsh local elections](#)



19 November 2020

The Green Party has welcomed the Senedd’s decision to allow councils in Wales to adopt a fairer voting system for next year’s local elections.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill [1] gives councils the option to drop the First Past the Post system in favour of the Single Transferable Vote.

Wales Green Party leader Anthony Slaughter said:

“It is great to see Wales finally starting to adopt a fairer voting system. Councils have an enormous impact on the lives of us all and so it is only right that people’s votes actually count.

“As in England, there is usually a very low turnout in local elections and a real lack of diversity in the outcome. The changes in this Bill, including votes at 16 and automatic voter registration, could not only increase participation but also provide a much fairer and representative result.

“We would now urge all councils across Wales to take up this option and drop the archaic First Past the Post system, or else risk ending up with a situation where some people have a fair vote and others do not.”

Notes

1

<https://business.senedd.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IIId=26688>

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[Greens warn defence budget increase fails to address biggest threats to our security](#)



19 November 2020

- **Amelia Womack: 'We are walking blindfold into a video game dystopia without a public debate'**

The Green Party has criticised the government announcement of a £16.5bn investment in defence which is taking place outside the framework of a full spending review. This represents a 10% increase in the defence budget

Green Party deputy leader Amelia Womack said:

“Just one day after offering a paltry amount for the climate, and amid talks of slashing the aid budget, the decision to prioritise the defence budget is clearly about posturing on the international stage rather than protecting security at home.

“As we leave the European Union we should establish the role of Global Britain as a peace-maker not warmonger. It should be our role to show leadership on multilateral negotiations to reduce the threats from drones and robots rather than accelerating a digital arms race.”

Greens argue that investment in a new space command, cyber force and artificial intelligence agency fail to target the real source of threats to our security.

Womack said:

“This is a massive escalation in the digital arms race but does nothing to address the real threats to our security that come from pandemics [1] and the

climate emergency [2], both of which are exacerbated by our inability to live in balance with our planet. We are walking blindfold into a video game dystopia without a public debate.

“To justify this investment on the basis of jobs is both immoral and deceitful. The work that really needs doing to protect our future lies in making our homes, farms, and transport system fit for the climate crisis.”

ENDS

Notes

1

RUSI report, [Revamping Crisis Resilience and Security in the Post-Pandemic World](#)

2

The World Economic Forum, [Global Risks Report 2020](#).

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