



TUSC, 17 Colebert House,  
Colebert Avenue,  
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E1 4JP

## An appeal to Labour councillors

# Stand up to the Tories' council cuts agenda

**Dear Councillor,**

We are writing to you as a local Labour Party councillor to try and arrange a convenient time for you to meet a delegation of trade unionists and anti-austerity activists to discuss how we can build the resistance to the continued Tory onslaught on local government.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), co-founded by the late Bob Crow, is determined that working class people should not pay for a crisis that we did not cause, and we are keen to work together with Labour representatives who take the same stance. We welcome the new political situation created by Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party.

We believe that Jeremy has been right to insist in his two successful leadership election campaigns that 'austerity is a political choice'. This applies to cuts and privatisation policies for local public services as much as it does to policies voted on at Westminster.

As a councillor you will know how ruthlessly the Tories have slashed government support for councils providing vital local public services since 2010. Their plan to phase out revenue support grant in favour of devolved business rate revenues by 2020 is another grave threat to the future of local government.

National government policy must be changed – but the fightback has to be conducted locally too, with a determination to expose the Tories' agenda and resist it in practise.

### **No cuts budgets**

In the last couple of years TUSC has worked with councillors in Southampton, Hull, Leicester and Warrington to try and get legally compliant no cuts budgets passed at annual budget-making meetings.

Based on the use of reserves and councils' borrowing powers, they were designed in each case to buy time for the council to organise a broad public campaign to compel the government to restore its funding, and to link up with other councils in a national campaign. Unfortunately, on each occasion, the alternative budgets were rejected by the majority Labour groups.

One reason for doing so was the argument that such a course was potentially 'illegal' and that Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell had themselves urged Labour Groups to support legal budgets, in their joint letter to Labour councillors in December 2015. An instruction to councillors not to support "any proposal to set an illegal budget" was endorsed by Labour's 2016 conference.

TUSC is not opposed to actions which take the labour movement and its representatives outside the provisions of unfair and unjust laws. We believe, for example, that Jeremy and John are right to say they

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would stand with trade unions that find themselves involved in 'illegal action' under the anti-union laws. But we also believe that it is possible for Labour councils to produce 'legally balanced' budgets that avoid cuts in the short term and provide a breathing space to build a campaign. We discuss the possibilities in more detail in a TUSC briefing document, *Preparing a no cuts People's Budget*, which is available online at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/355.pdf>, and we would very much like to explore the contents of this with you.

## **Housing and health**

There are in addition other, new battlegrounds opening up for councillors to contend with in the next period, which we would also like to discuss with you.

The Tories' Housing and Planning Act is an existential threat to public housing provision as it has developed in the post-war period. Once again the Tories' agenda must be exposed – and, with councils in the front line alongside housing associations, ways explored to resist it in practise.

TUSC welcomes the call made in the housing resolution agreed at Labour's 2016 annual conference for a 'pause' in the implementation of the Act's provisions. In fact, without the co-operation of councils, it is hard to see how a pay-to-stay 'tenant tax' or fixed-term tenancies, for example, could be imposed.

With many regulations still to be determined, there is every opportunity for a united campaign by Labour councils to defeat this legislation and we would be very keen to discuss with you what action could be taken to this end.

Councils could similarly play an important role in resisting damaging attacks on local NHS services that emerge from the 'Sustainability and Transformation Plan' (STP) process to find £22 billion 'efficiency savings' from the NHS by 2020.

A co-ordinated campaign by Labour councils using their health scrutiny powers, combined with trade union and community resistance to the inevitable cuts the STP process will entail, could throw back the Tories' plans. Again this is something we would like to discuss.

## **Planning for action**

This is why we would like to have, initially, a face-to-face meeting with you to discuss what joint action against the Tories' agenda is possible.

We are also approaching local government trade union branches in your council to the same end.

TUSC supporters have been centrally involved in winning backing this year for a no cuts budgets strategy in national bodies of the main local government unions, Unison, Unite, and the GMB, as well as the 2016 Wales TUC conference. We want to follow that up with concrete preparations for the 2017-18 council budgets.

One suggestion would be to organise local conferences to prepare alternative 'People's Budgets' for the council budget-making meetings that will take place in early 2017. The aim would be not to 'consult' on where cuts should fall but to draw trade unionists and the community into a defence of local public services.

We can surely agree that democratic local government is in grave danger from the Tories' agenda. And we hope that we can agree to discuss what can be done to save it.

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