



TUSC survey replies – preliminary report

Building on Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message

At its September meeting the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition national steering committee launched a survey to find out how far local Labour councillors are preparing to back Jeremy Corbyn's anti-cuts policies in next year's council budget-setting process and, in the councils where they are taking place, in next year's local elections.

The survey questions were:

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

What are the main outlines of the council Labour Group's initial proposals for the 2018-19 budget? Specifically we would like to know if there are cuts to jobs and services being suggested and what they are.

Question 2: The council's consultation process

Are there details available of any public consultation exercise the council is planning on its proposals? Have the local authority trade unions tabled discussions on the 2018-19 budget?

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

If the council has elections next year – check out the TUSC directory of elections at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/401.pdf> – when will the local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto be agreed? This is the responsibility of the Labour Group in consultation with the local party's Local Campaign Forum – what is the political balance of this body and how has it changed since Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader?

Question 4: Labour candidate selection

How far advanced are Labour's local candidate selections? Is the rule in Labour's constitution allowing people to vote in selection meetings after six months membership being applied or are more stringent restrictions operating locally? Where candidates have been selected have right-wing Blairites been replaced by publically identified Jeremy Corbyn supporters?

Local groups were asked to return questionnaires before the 15th November steering committee meeting even if every detail is not complete. The replies received so far are listed below, grouped by regions.

London

Name of council: Camden

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

Question 2: The council's consultation process

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

No details yet

Question 4: Labour candidate selections

Every single sitting councillor who wanted to stand again has been selected to do so, in a process that started in September. The Local Campaign Forum is firmly controlled by the right-wing, for example excluding a known Corbyn-supporter with 40 years party membership from the candidates' panel.

The recent annual meeting of the Holborn & St Pancras constituency Labour Party within the borough saw the right-wing win the officers' positions by 60 votes to 48.

As the local paper, the Camden New Journal put it recently, "a sound body of trusted candidates who tend to be, at least, suspicious of Corbyn politics" have been selected and "next year the new Labour council will probably remain safely with the old guard".

Name of council: Hackney

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

The budget cut for next year is approximately £13 million, with big job cuts likely to be avoided in favour of further 'salami slicing'.

The council has just done a consultation however to increase the amount of Council Tax paid by benefit claimants to 20% of the total charge. This has caused a certain furore in the local Labour Party membership with Hackney South Constituency Labour Party voting by 55 to five against the proposal. However the directly-elected Labour Mayor still seems to be in favour even before any published analysis of the consultation has taken place.

Question 2: The council's consultation process

The council unions have not tabled formal discussions on the budget although the Mayor has met with the branch secretaries of the respective unions on other issues. The door should still be open for this to happen.

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

They have recently held a consultation meeting open to all Labour Party members in the borough and approximately 120 attended over two days, but with every indication being that the Labour Group will still carry on with its right-wing policies and ignore the members' input. The manifesto might not be published until the New Year.

Question 4: Labour candidate selection

All the selections as far as we know were completed by the end of September. Of the current 50 councillors nine have stood down for a variety of reasons. We are not sure of the political complexion of all the new candidates but the balance is more likely to be on the right rather than pro-Corbyn, which would not change the current overall balance of the Labour Group to the right.

Name of council: Haringey

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

Question 2: The council's consultation process

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

No details yet

Question 4: Labour candidate selections

The dominating issue within the Labour Party is the proposal to redevelop the Tottenham area of the borough through the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) 'partnership' with a private development corporation, Lendlease, without the say of the tenants, residents and small businesses affected.

Significantly, after Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party conference speech pledge to insist on compulsory ballots before such developments can proceed, it was the lead councillor for regeneration in Haringey who was the first Labour councillor to publically reject the policy. Possibly more than anywhere else in Britain Blairite councillors are under real threat.

The candidate selection process for next year's elections is ongoing with a number of pro-HDV councillors deselected. However, while there are more contests to come, some pro-HDV sitting councillors have been re-nominated to stand, including council leader Claire Kober.

Although they have certainly not had it all their own way, one factor in the better than expected performance of the right-wing was that the cut-off date by which members had to join the Labour Party to be eligible to vote in the selection meetings was set as 9th January 2017, before the influx of new members who joined during and after the general election.

Name of council: Lewisham

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

Question 2: The council's consultation process

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

No details yet

Question 4: Labour candidate selections

There is no overall picture of the results of the ward councillors' selections yet but earlier this summer the borough party membership voted to select a new candidate for the directly-elected Mayor, to replace the right-wing incumbent Sir Steve Bullock, who is retiring.

The winner was the Steve Bullock-supported councillor Damien Egan, who defeated the Corbyn supporter Paul Bell (a councillor in the former Socialist Party-held ward of Telegraph Hill). Egan does not appear on the list of councillors who backed Owen Smith's leadership campaign in the 2016 coup – presumably because, having supported the open Blairite candidate Liz Kendall in the 2015 leadership election, Owen Smith was too left wing! What is clear is that he will not provide an alternative to the austerity policies that have been pursued in a Labour-dominated council with just one (Green Party) opposition councillor.

Name of council: Tower Hamlets

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

No specific proposal for 2018-19 has been released publically. However a Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-2021 was released on 18th September. It proposed £52 million of "savings" over the course of 2018 to 2020.

Question 2: The council's consultation process

The Budget Scrutiny Committee meets on 15th & 24th January 2018. There will be a further meeting on 5th February if further changes are passed at a Cabinet meeting on 30th January. The first full council meeting to consider the budget will take place on 21st February. The final council meeting on the budget will take place on 1st March.

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

No election manifesto is available publically yet. A series of consultations with branch meetings took place in September and October.

Question 4: Labour candidate selection

The current directly-elected Mayor John Biggs, a long-term Labour right-winger, was selected earlier this year as Labour's candidate for next May's mayoral election.

From October the selection process for ward councillor candidates has been underway and thus far five wards have held final selection meetings, with 12 candidates chosen. All the sitting councillors who wanted to stand have been re-nominated. Of the three non-sitting councillors selected so far Ehteshamul Haque (Blackwall & Cubbit Town ward) is a leading local member of Momentum and the political background of the other two is unclear. The selection process is scheduled to be completed by the end of November.

North West

Name of council: Manchester City Council

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

The Labour group set a three-year budget in February 2017 of £30m cuts until 2020. This included:

- Increase council tax by 4.99% each year
- Cut the amount of Council Tax Support including abolishing the family premium for new applicants and limiting children's allowance to two children.
- £12m 'savings' through the integration of Health & Social care – no details have been provided but the main aim is to "re-commission" services.
- £180,000 cuts to Sure Starts and children's centres
- Cutting school crossing patrols (saving £220,000)
- Increase charges on bereavement services to "competitive rates" raising an extra £60,000 a year
- Job cuts in Revenue & Benefits totalling £448,000

Question 2: The council's consultation process

There was an online budget consultation between December 2016 and February 2017. No concrete proposals were consulted on, it was about agreeing (or not) with where "priorities" should be. No details are available of any additional consultation for 2018-19.

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

The council leader Richard Leese has circulated headline points for the 2018 manifesto, with a deadline for policy proposals to be submitted to him, as the co-ordinator of the process, by January 31st, with the manifesto to be finalised by March 2018. We don't have any information on the overall political balance of the Local Campaign Forum.

Question 4: Labour candidate selection

Information on this is not yet available in most cases but we have had snippets from some wards, with most selection meetings taking place in October/November. With boundary

changes in Manchester, all 96 seats are up for election in May. We know of two Corbyn supporters who have been selected so far,

Name of council: Salford City Council

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

There are no details available yet on the 2018-19 budget other than there are plans for £14m cuts (as part of making £42m cuts by 2020). The 2017-18 budget aimed to make £16m of cuts but the council has not been able to implement them all so it is likely that the 2018-19 budget will contain higher than the current £14m worth of cuts plans.

This year there has been the closure of Salford's only residential home for disabled children and cuts to regulatory services – both major issues which the main union, Unison, has been fighting and are potentially balloting for strike action over. Many other services are still “under review” as agreed in the 2017-18 budget.

Question 2: The council's consultation process

No details on consultations at the moment. Unison will be proposing an alternative ‘no cuts’ budget in 2018 as it did in 2017.

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

No information on a local manifesto and when it will be agreed. We don't have any information on the political balance of the LCF.

Question 4: Labour candidate selection

Information is not available yet for most wards but we know of one right-wing councillor who has been de-selected and replaced by a Corbyn supporter. Selection meetings are on-going.

Southern

Name of council: Southampton

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

Southampton passed a two-year budget in February 2017 which has seen cuts to bin services, introduction of two-week collections, and cuts to housing. The twenty schools that were in deficit have now been reduced to 13 through schools being pushed to make cuts and the council refusing to allow them ‘licensed deficits’ to avoid doing so, despite a call from the National Education Union (NEU) and local meetings and marches on the issue.

Cuts to adult care include the Kentish Road Respite Centre, where parents have mounted a vibrant campaign that has forced the council to suspend the original closure date. The council cabinet is still proposing closure but the scrutiny panel rejected their proposal under pressure from the campaign and anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell. Parents have accused the council of bullying and intimidation to get families to agree to new care packages.

Capita have been under instructions from the Labour council to pressure social workers into cutting care packages to the elderly and disabled, offering £200 ‘bonuses’ for each package cut.

We are not sure yet what the council will do in February 2018. Other proposals it is currently consulting on are plans to set up a Local Authority Trading Company, which may involve further privatisation of services.

Question 2: The council's consultation process

There are no consultation proposals from the council. The council is in discussions with the unions over cuts in union facilities time.

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto

The Southampton Labour Party AGM is taking place next week with a strong possibility that the left may win a majority on its executive committee. But there is no information yet on how this may relate to the drawing up of the 2018 local manifesto.

Question 4: Labour candidate selection

Candidates have been selected and, of the 16 seats up for election next year, two Corbyn supporters have been chosen, to stand in 'Tory' wards where there are no current Labour councillors.

Wales

Name of council: Cardiff

Question 1: Labour's initial budget proposals

The council Labour Group is proposing £22 million worth of cuts for 2018-19, on top of £120 million made already. This year's plans are part of a total of £80 million planned for the next three years. There is no intention by the group of taking a different road to obediently making all cuts the Tories demand. It's like Jeremy Corbyn never happened.

Question 2: The council's consultation process

Public consultation is likely to begin in a couple of months. Trade unions are involved but have been ignored in the past, with leisure services privatised/outsourced despite vehement opposition from Unison, which has previously organised strike action against sacking the entire workforce so they could be re-employed on contracts short one hour.

Question 3: The local Labour Party's 2018 local election manifesto**Question 4: Labour candidate selections**

There are no elections in Cardiff in 2018.