

Budget Reply

It is good to hear all the positive things that are being achieved in Worthing. It is good that the Cabinet are supporting their officers in the innovative changes taking place.

I am concerned that the announcement of the rise in Council Tax has already been announced as if the vote in this chamber is irrelevant. Maybe it is?

I think that this is the first time that I have read a budget that has so many allusions to statements from the Conservative government in Westminster.

Last year I mentioned that the talk about localising service should have been talk about localising blame. I am afraid it would appear that I was being prophetic. I feel quite sorry for the administration.

It seems that as soon as the government gave us something they took back something more. We were really pleased to hear that we were going to get some income from the Business Rates. Trouble is we can only put them up if we have an elected mayor. Oh and the allocation was less than expected and Oh by the way we are also removing the Revenue Support Grant.

We are also advised that when a school becomes an academy it no longer has to pay business rates, this could also apply to NHS trusts. That will leave a massive hole which needs plugging.

The New Homes bonus sounded like a good idea until we find that it will only be paid for 3 years rather than the original 5 years. How did that happen? Surely the 5 year figure came from the same place as the 3 year figure? Could it be a mistake or just a cynical ploy to ease it in? Talking of cynical ploys when the government were mooting a figure that would render people unfit to have a council house it was suggested that £60,000 a year would be reasonable. It has now

become £30,000 ie two people earning £15,000 a year each could well be homeless at even greater cost to the council.

Balancing the budget seems to be a Sisyphean task. No sooner have the officers rolled the boulder up the hill than the government changes the rules and they have to start again. This is no way to run a country. There has been a rebellion in the Shires were it appeared that the Revenue Support Grant had gone negative. There has now been a face saving payment to stop local Conservatives councils getting too annoyed but it is only for this year! What a mess.

With all these pressures I am not surprised that a council Tax increase has had to be initiated. However hard the local Conservatives have tried to avoid it their colleagues in Westminster seem determined to hide their deficits by exporting them to local councils. We have not only have less money but we are left with the cost of administering these “localized services”.

The Council Tax is of course regressive and that means that the poorest are going to be most in the firing line. I am pleased that there is still a Discretionary Housing Grant in place but that could well be needed more this year. Last year we set aside £80,000 and used £40,000. As the local Conservatives lobbied so well for Worthing that we managed to squeeze an extra £99,000 out of the government I would like to propose an amendment.

That we set aside another £30,000 into a hardship fund to help stop homelessness and debt.

This will save the council money in the long run as we will not be having to deal with those problems. A sort of Invest to save?