

Mr Mayor, Fellow Councillors, Colleagues, and Members of the Public,  
Worthing is an amazing place to live and if you ask people why they have moved to Worthing they often reply it because we have the pleasure of being close to the Sea, near the Downs and within a reasonable working distance albeit by Southern Rail to London for business and leisure.

Unsurprising they don't say it's because we have a fantastic Council services and plenty of activities for children over 8yrs old and families get a great housing deal.

Mr Mayor we cannot stress it enough that it is not **how much** you throw at a project but **how wisely and where the money is spent**.

Liberal Democrats in opposition have, throughout the year scrutinised how the Council's limited budget is allocated, - limited I have to say by the Conservative government. We must revisit the fact that we are here for the people – the people are not here to sustain the Council services.

We have done our task of scrutiny throughout the year and have suggested possible solutions and alternative paths – and whilst we are willing to work with colleagues - it is beholden to the Controlling Conservative group to be responsible for the public's welfare.

We applaud the improvement of Teville Gate, Cllr. Smytherman has often argued for positive action, despite being criticised for suggesting the council uses the growth fund to demolish the car park – a barrier to development.

We applaud working positively with Private Landlords, the work on reducing homelessness, and sea front improvements. We have and will continue to be instrumental in making our Brooklands Lake improvement, - we are great

supporters of our Theatres but the continued subsidy is still a large bone of contention.

It is not value for money for Worthing tax payers if they have to go without essential services that they value; Night centres to get homeless people off the streets, Dog wardens, Pest control, clean streets, Safe Cycling routes, Community Grants and especially Dial a Ride – or Community Transport – the name matters not, it is the people and their welfare that matters. How far will the proposed £31,020 budget for Community Transport get you – even without taking depreciation of vehicles into account?

As Liberal Democrats we have had input on viability of planning applications, challenging the Vacant Building Credit, Challenging Hate Crime, and unfair tax increases for those on very limited disposable incomes as low as £210 per month. We seek to improve the well-being of people falling foul of the insensitive cuts being thrust upon the public without thought for the consequences.

Mr Mayor, Much is being done **by our committed officers** on the development of our physical Town and they are to be congratulated and we'd like them know that the work they do on a daily basis is appreciated by us.

Similarly, we now can see advances in community well-being – our officer's involvement alongside WSCC in the Integrated Prevention and Earliest Help group which reaches out to organisations who support young people from birth to 25yrs of age. IT junctions are also supporting residents from all age groups.

Much of the responsibility for this work is being taken by caring volunteers without financial support. This isn't sustainable.

A recent headline in the media stated “Social Care crisis leaves millions living in pain”. This applies to Worthing people too – we are not exempt from disability, inequality nor hardship, and what makes it even more frustrating is the travesty of justice that councils have to be in competition with charities for essential funding streams, cuts being focused on the “soft” targets.

We often hear the phrase – “people have a choice “– People living with hardship, disability, or health issues don’t have the privilege of a real choice – it is eat or heat or pay the rent.

For those of us with disposable income we have the choice to go out to a restaurant or pay a bit more to go to the theatre – which begs the question why in this continued time of austerity and cuts is this Conservative Council still shoring up the Theatres with yet more subsidy - prioritising £1.5m for the benefit of the privileged few.

There is no guarantee there will be a profit return either in the long term or the short term which could be ploughed back into other services which would benefit a greater number of residents as a whole – tax payer or not.

Lastly, whilst we believe there is room for improvement in certain areas, given that the Assembly Rooms are in the process of being outsourced currently - the Theatres could become the responsibility of a Trust as the Dome was some years ago.

We acknowledge the excellent work being done in Housing and would hope that this will continue and expand its toolkit via a grounded council lettings agency and good landlord scheme in the near future for the benefit of all renters.

Mr Mayor, The overall theme of this speech is the responsibility for wellbeing of all residents and spending what money we have wisely and sensitively. The well spent money on the Museum is one such example.

Recently a volunteer who assists people living with Dementia, took his client to our local Museum. Dementia, which as we know can affect any one of us. It was a spontaneous act to fill some time before taking the gentleman to the dentist. The outcome of that thoughtful gesture was that the person became alive and excited about the exhibits which stimulated his memories of his past life. An amazing outcome for both client and carer, which we hope will be replicated time and time again.

The money spent on the Museum is being evidenced by the physical, healthy impact on an individual – but it also reflects the promise we made to the Town for it to be dementia friendly.

In short, we urge this council to think again over the coming year - nothing is set in stone – budgets have been known to have underspends and variances and wriggle room - reconsider the Town's priorities and put those most in need of support at the fore front of your considerations and put the residents of Worthing as whole first. We are all here to serve and to Govern is to choose – we urge you to make the ethical choice – As the well - known German Conservative Leader Angela Merkel says “Make it easier for the people”.

Therefore, Mr Mayor, it is with regret that whilst the Theatres' subsidy remains at £1.5 million and services for certain groups like Community Transport are cut increasing the inequality of quality of life in our Town we cannot vote for the budget as it stands. Thank you.

Cllrs. Hazel Thorpe & Bob Smytherman (Liberal Democrats)