

Not only has another year gone by but we're in to a new decade and with it a new world as the UK has now left the European Union. Yes - the Government has indeed "Got Brexit Done" and is moving on to Unleash Britain's Potential.

As the Prime Minister promised before last year's General Election this is being done by investing in the NHS, in schools and in the police force. New hospitals will be built, more doctors and nurses will be recruited, school funding and teachers' pay will be raised and there will be a vast expansion in police numbers.

The country is going to see a great "levelling up" of left behind communities and vital infrastructure spending is being planned. This is all incredibly promising and I believe bodes for a bright future for the country. But it will be critical that during this process Worthing is not overlooked or worse, judged to be a part of the country that has already had sufficient investment and so can afford to wait until other parts have been levelled up. This evening I'm presenting a budget that will support this Council's agenda and provide a platform for much needed investment in our area. An area that as I will argue also requires, and crucially deserves, some assistance from the Government in the 'levelling up' process.

Colleagues, we have done our bit in recent years and we will continue to do so. As the government steps up support for communities, we will be ready to help them with that agenda.

It's worth recapping what we have achieved.

Ten years ago the incoming coalition government had a number of pressing issues to deal with but none greater than reducing and eliminating the deficit after public sector borrowing had risen to over £150bn in the previous year. In the ten years since then Worthing Borough Council has seen a reduction in government funding of over £6m. That may sound a modest amount in the grand scheme of things when compared to the £150bn deficit, but it was a huge proportion of the revenue that this Council used to fund services. We took these reductions and in doing so, we have played our part in helping to resolve the problem with the deficit which has now been virtually eliminated to the point that the national debt to GDP ratio is finally heading in the right direction.

Worthing Borough Council has achieved this through reducing costs wherever we can and over the years that has meant turning over every stone to ensure that we're not spending where there isn't a genuine public value argument. So we've exploited VAT exemptions where we can; we've stepped back from the direct provision of services such as leisure, culture and pest control where others can do it more effectively and without the same long term cost to the taxpayer; we have used cheaper but equally efficient software where we can; we've restructured our debt repayments; we have invested time and effort in to ensuring that our procurement processes are as effective as possible at purchasing what we need at the best rates.

And over recent years we have proven adept at being able to anticipate where new cost pressures may arise and taking action to prepare and plan our reaction. A good example is

the way we led the countywide effort to respond to the removal of some of the support for charities that provide accommodation for vulnerable adults. Without that work the financial implications would have been much greater for this Council and the local taxpayers.

To offset the reductions in funding we have successfully moved on to a more commercial footing. We are constantly reviewing our fees and charges. Not just to ensure that the Council's charges are set at the most appropriate level to spread the cost of services, but also to encourage a wider take up of chargeable or discretionary services to those who may benefit from them.

Our strategic investment fund has been absolutely vital in generating income to help sustain services that the public depend upon. Without that income we simply wouldn't be able to do all that we do now and any critics of the scheme should be aware of the fact that the cost of not pursuing these investments would fall heavily on the residents of Worthing.

It is worth pointing out that if the rest of the public sector had been able to achieve the same rate of savings there would have been no national deficit for a long time now. We would, in fact, have a large national surplus. We, both Worthing Borough Council and the community in Worthing have well and truly done our bit.

And this is evidenced by a quick analysis of public spending across the country. To take the two most pertinent examples, it is the case that the amount of public spending per head in our region is, at £8,100, the lowest in the UK.

10% lower than the national average.

20% lower than London.

Spending per head on local roads and local public transport is lower in the south-east than in any other English region outside London.

As the levelling up begins let it not be ignored that we *already* receive less funding per head than any other part of the country.

And it is of course not just the case that we in Worthing have tightened our belts and carried on doing just a bare minimum. On the contrary, on many of the issues that the Government has been delivering on - and is committed to deliver much more on - we have been ambitious and are punching well above our weight.

Nationally, another great success of the past decade in Britain has been the astonishing growth in employment rates. Despite predictions from the usual 'doomsters and gloomsters' that there would be mass unemployment as a result of the Government's economic and fiscal policies the exact opposite has happened. Employment rates in this country are now at the highest levels they have been at any point in the last fifty years. The predictions of recession or even depression have been proven wrong as economic growth has continued and likewise, inflation rates have remained low.

Again, here in Worthing we have been playing our part in delivering a stronger economy and will continue to do so.

Our ambitions to develop on brownfield sites are coming to fruition. The site of the former Aquarena leisure centre is transforming before our eyes. At Teville Gate we assisted where we could in securing funding for demolition works and supporting HMRC's move into the town centre. The new offices are being constructed and will be home to 900 members of staff.

Our partnership with BoKluk UK has received national attention and the Council owned land at Fullbeck Avenue will soon be redeveloped.

When the private sector failed to redevelop the site of the old Worthing Police Station at Union Place we secured funding from the Local Enterprise Partnership and entered into an agreement with LCR to take control of the site and a planning application for the outline redevelopment is due very soon. This partnership is genuinely exciting and it is a testament to this Council's ability to make these sort of deals that LCR even considered working with us.

Through our partnerships with the local business community, the County Council, the LEP and the Greater Brighton Economic Board we've been able to support business advice services and apprenticeships. Most notably our recent agreement with Greater Brighton Met, formerly Northbrook College, means that they will have the funding to provide an even wider range of high quality courses for young people in Worthing.

Our seafront investment plan will be vital to securing a bright future for the local economy and already we've been able to make important changes. The installation of the largest ever observation wheel on the South coast is a perfect example of the way in which we are helping to create more and more reasons for people to visit Worthing.

Across the developed world town centres are seeing significant changes as shopping habits change to out of town centres and online. Town centres across the country have been far too reliant on retail therapy and we need to move to a more varied model. There needs to be a far greater mix of shopping, dining, leisure, work and living in our town centres. We're supporting those moves and there are signs that Worthing is still holding its own as the Town Centre Initiative report lower unit vacancy rates than at this time last year. To support this work it is critical that the programme of works to regenerate brownfield sites and the public realm move forward at pace. Worthing Borough Council stands ready to do all necessary to assist our partners with this aim. The government is committed to supporting town centres across the country but it is notable again that 75% of the towns fund has been committed to towns in the Midlands and the North. The south coast deserves its fair share and Worthing is ready, willing and able to assist.

The area in which we are most definitely leading the way is that of improving Digital Infrastructure. The gigabit programme to deliver ultra fast broadband speeds across West

Sussex was led by us and as the fibre goes into homes, businesses and public services across Worthing it's clear that we're already well ahead of the vast majority of the country in this area. We will be the first town in the South East to have such a broad level of ultrafast coverage. This helps not just the people of Worthing but the country as a whole as the UK makes technological progress that other developed economies are slow to grasp. Expanding and exploiting ultrafast infrastructure are top priorities for the Government. We are ready to help.

As we go into the post-EU world exporting around the globe will become more and more important. In Worthing we have a number of great firms who export all over the world. These include GlaxoSmithKline, ETI, B&W loudspeakers and a special mention for World of Books who were on Sunday listed in the Sunday Times as one of the nation's fastest growing exporters due to expansions in America. Through our work with the Greater Brighton Economic Board we're ensuring that we support them and any other firms in the area by investing in initiatives such as the inward investment desk.

None of this can be taken for granted though. We will require more help from the Government and we should remind all concerned that we have not had a fair deal over the past twenty-five years. Productivity gains for the Coast to Capital region in which we sit were steady until the turn of the century. Since the millenium there has been virtually no productivity growth across the region. While other parts of the country enjoyed investments in critical infrastructure such as roads, we have not been so lucky. This is not the fair deal that Worthing deserved and deserves. This is why we at Worthing Borough Council need to continue with our high aims and encourage the Government to meet our ambitions.

The Prime Minister has correctly prioritised the NHS and the housing market as areas for additional support. His plans are ambitious but so are ours and we have a track record to be proud of.

Due to decades of inaction there is a housing crisis in this country and it does affect the people of Worthing where we have one of the worst house prices to earnings ratios in the country. We have led the way in providing solutions for the people of Worthing. The £10m that we made available for Worthing Homes has now been invested in new homes which directly helps members of our community who most need support. The building schemes that I've already mentioned will ensure an expanded housing supply and the investments that we have made in temporary accommodation units mean that many people in Worthing who are in need will not have to travel to other areas for housing. We have been successful in using our own resources and those provided by the Ministry for Housing to reduce rough sleeper numbers in recent years. Not only has this been genuinely life changing, even life saving, for many local people, it means that we still have better rough sleeper numbers than comparable coastal authorities in Sussex such as Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne and Hastings.

We are all proud of our local NHS and not least the fact that we have the best hospital in the country - rated outstanding in all areas. We'll welcome the extra funding for the local health

service but it's worth reiterating that for some years now we have been delivering support that is well above the norm for District and Borough Councils.

Our health prevention work is helping people into healthier lives and the 'Going Local' social prescribing scheme has helped well in excess of 1000 residents to make vital changes to their lives and reduce their dependence on the health services.

Where we've been able to we have intervened to help with the opening of new premises for GP surgeries. Two have opened in west Worthing in recent years. We have led work with a variety of local NHS providers to deliver a health hub on the current site of the Civic Centre car park which will house new premises for two GP surgeries and modern spaces for a number of other parts of the NHS.

The Health Secretary and Chancellor could do far worse than look to Worthing for a model for healthcare and an area to work with.

Environmental issues have raced up the public agenda in recent years and through the Environment Bill and associated actions the Government is committed to making big improvements to public policy relating to the environment. Conservative MP after Conservative MP has been queuing up to join the Conservative Environment Network of late. Some of us were members before it was cool. Conserving the environment for future generations should be a natural choice for any Conservative and I welcome the Government's renewed commitment. We as a nation have much to be proud of. Our carbon emissions continue to fall and we're ahead of the vast majority of countries in the race to achieve net zero.

But caring for our environment is something that we've been doing for a long time at Worthing Borough Council. We maintain a fantastic number and array of green spaces and continue to achieve more green flag awards. The plans that we're bringing forward for the improvements to Highdown Gardens and Brooklands Parklands will ensure that both are treasured visitor destinations for years to come.

As we've recently reported our recycling rates are now improving quite rapidly and as a Council we've made significant moves to reduce our reliance on single use plastics. By supporting and helping to launch initiatives such as Refill Worthing we're helping the wider community to reduce the use of single use plastics.

We have committed to moving to net zero by 2030 and a plan on how to do so has been published. Today the Government has announced another £90m of funding to support the development of alternative energy and here in Worthing we're working with West Sussex County Council on extending the use of solar panels, electric vehicle charging points, battery storage and heat pump technology across the area.

Worthing Borough Council's influence on all of these matters across our region has been growing in recent years. The fantastic progress that we've been making has given us the credibility to offer leadership and support in many areas.

In the past twelve months the Chairmanship of the Greater Brighton Economic Board and board places for district and borough councils on Transport for the South East and the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership all became vacant. It was to Worthing Borough Council that the different bodies all looked for a partner to take on these roles. This and our excellent working relationship with numerous other bodies across the area means that we're now in a position to lead the arguments for a greater slice of the national cake for improvements to the A27 and the railways, for more investment in digital technologies and for assistance from the towns fund.

Members will also have noticed that Worthing Borough Council has this year been shortlisted for the Local Government Chronicle's Council of the Year. While this in and of itself makes not a jot of difference to the residents of Worthing, it is nonetheless a prestigious accolade and a recognition that we are doing things for our residents that are not being achieved across in all Councils. We should all be proud of this shortlisting and we'll find out how we've done next month.

So we, this Council, the Councillors who serve in this chamber, the officers who work for the Council and the community in Worthing, we have done our bit and will continue to do so. We have played our part in getting the nation's finances back on track and we'll continue to ensure we help to keep the books balanced. We've done our bit to keep the economy moving and to get built the homes that families in our community need. We'll keep doing that wherever we can. We have a proud track record of supporting the local NHS and we are committed to achieving a cleaner and greener environment for future generations of Worthing residents. We have the credibility and clout to work with influential partners across the economic, housing, health and education sectors in our region to deliver a brighter future for our area.

And we are open minded about what we may have to offer in return to a Government that is committed to levelling up but concerned about fragmentation and unclear lines of accountability. Now to be clear to any members opposite who may be excited about that I am not advocating an expensive and counterproductive rush to abolish this Council and replace it with a bunch of Parish Councils.

What I will say is that this is a Council committed to working with the Government to deliver a better future for our area and the residents who we represent, and we won't be doctrinaire in our approach to any conversations.

It's time for a fairer deal for our region. It's time for a fairer deal for Worthing. We have a Government that is committed to levelling up. We have a Council that has proven itself as a body that is prepared to aim high and deliver.

This budget sets the financial means to deliver the next three years of the Platforms for our Place agenda. An agenda which will ensure that we're best placed to work with our partners and the Government to deliver a Worthing that will roar into the twenties and our post EU world.

Colleagues I commend this budget to you. Let's prove the doomsters and the gloomsters wrong and Unleash Worthing's Potential.