

Every February, this Council holds its own version of Groundhog Day; I guess from what Cllr Suttle has just presented, he saw his shadow and the financial blight on Dorset will continue for another year.

This is the fourth budget for Dorset Council, the third created by this Tory administration and yet again it has raised the council tax burden on the long suffering population of Dorset by the maximum possible. Last year it was 5%, this year another 3% compounded on that.

Some of our residents will benefit from a small, one-off rebate to their council tax bill but this will only serve to generate a more significant actual rise in their bills next year when this administration will again undoubtedly levy the maximum increase possible.

We have no assurance that this budget won't be overspent. In fact, the small windfall in one-off funding recently promised being earmarked as 'contingency' rather than being used elsewhere pretty much implies the original figures were understated.

We continue to pay one of the highest council taxes in the country.

Do we get more than anyone else for that burden?

No, we don't! The fact is that we pay more than others for the same or less.

Year on year our residents are asked to pay for services that should be centrally funded. We have numerous areas under Dorset Council control that exceed 30% of children in poverty, over 40% in places such as Underhill. We are propping up the social mobility indices. We have some of the lowest wages in the country.

And now we have inflation at levels not seen for a generation, petrol and diesel prices are at record highs and energy costs are going up by more than 100% with additional increases on the horizon. This will put many, many more of our residents into fuel poverty.

And yet we keep asking our residents to cough up greater than they can afford when for significantly more than ever, heating their residence and putting food on the table will dominate everyday life.

For over decade, ALL of our representatives in parliament have been in government yet it's difficult to quantify the benefit that this has brought to our residents, because quite simply there hasn't been any.

Boris Johnson's Tory government won't be sending any significant amounts of 'levelling up' funding to Dorset Council; this much was admitted in parliament recently by South Dorset MP Richard Drax in about the only cognisant statement he's ever made.

Every year we are told that the reason we are at the top of the highest council tax league yet continue to add the maximum permissible to our residents' bills, is that our central government funding is inequitable. Yes, Council Tax is outdated and regressive, but we keep pouring on the misery year on year without this Tory administration managing to do anything about it.

As Sir Edward Grey might once have said to Douglas Adams,

"The lamps are going out all over Dorset; we shall not see them lit again until we have a council led by people who really know where their towels are."