

Well, this isn't easy, is it?

In terms of **people**, COVID has had a profound effect on us all, including on our financial security. According to the Resolution Foundation, the richest 10% of UK households are £50,000 better off, while an additional 700,000 people, including 120,000 children, fell below the poverty line. Even more will do so now the £20 a week boost to universal credit has been scrapped.

In this context, we support the protection of front line services for those in greatest need, primarily in Adult Social Care and Children's Services, which together comprise 65% of this budget. Nevertheless, we know some of the £11m tactical savings will cause real hardship for some families.

In terms of our **planet**, time is fast running out if it is to be habitable for future generations. According to Climate Action Tracker, EVEN IF all the pledges made at COP26 are honoured, global temperatures will rise by c2.4 degrees, which would be disastrous, and many think this an extremely conservative estimate. Of course this comes down to global politics and economics, but we must play our part here in Dorset, not only in the interests of future generations but also to improve our quality of life locally, right now, in terms of, for example, cleaner air and protecting local ecologies.

We therefore welcome the inclusion in the budget of revenue and capital spending to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency. However, it's now nearly three years since we declared this, and it IS an emergency, so pace matters. We have been pressing for these budget lines from the start – even without a detailed plan, we knew in 2019 that this would cost money.

But, given that funding from central to local government has been cut by around 40% since 2010, and Dorset's Revenue Support Grant reduced from £80m to zero, how do we pay for this?

I wish we could spend some of the additional £4m being allocated to Contingency on, for example, youth services or community facilities, but we feel obliged to support this because, according to the Bank of England and other forecasters, the 2% inflation assumption in this budget could be closer to 5 or even 6%, which would require closer to £20m than £4m.

Where we do see some promise is in our excess assets. We now have a strategy but making progress on generating income from them must be a priority.

So, finally, to Council Tax. A 3% increase will hit our poorer households hard, but we feel we have no choice but to support it in order to play our part in protecting our most vulnerable residents, and our planet, within the limited resources available to us.