

Budgets 2022 – Seconder response

Firstly, can I congratulate Cabinet Member – Gary Suttle and other members of the Cabinet, as well as senior officers Aidan Dunn, Jim McManus, other Directors and all those involved, for the excellent work that has been carried out in the preparation of the 2022/23 budget we have before us this evening. This is without doubt Chairman a well-presented budget, a budget which has been zero based. A Budget which has enabled members of this council to get a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities we will face in the coming months and years ahead.

Can I echo the remarks made by Gary Suttle regarding the key role that the two cross-party Budget Cafes and the two Scrutiny Committees have played this year, in what has been a very challenging process. Ensuring we are able to have a balanced budget; achieved without the need for reductions in services. Such an approach has allowed unprecedented involvement by members cross-party, fitting well with the pledge I made at Annual Council in May 2019 that we should work in a collaborative way across the chamber, working at all times to achieve the best outcomes for our communities.

We have made significant progress since becoming Dorset Council in May 2019, close to three years ago, and contrary to some recent comments in the media this council has come a long way showing ambition and determination, even during the worst pandemic for over 100 years. We have saved almost £30m so far with much more to come thanks to LGR. Convergence, transformation and the challenges of increased cost pressures

dealing with COVID have been our focus; been faced and overcome.

We still of course have much more to do, but I believe we are on the right track, moving forward at pace, having achieved so much since May 2019.

Gary Suttle eloquently set out the assumptions on which the budget has been based, so I will not dwell on this further.

I am reminded about our commitment, as elected members, that on the formation of the Unitary Council, services would be safeguarded. That is exactly what this budget does, with no old fashioned top slicing. In addition, we continue to invest heavily, in service delivery for Adult and Children's Social Care, demonstrating this council's wholehearted commitment to the more vulnerable in our communities, who need our support on a daily basis. Investment in the future is at the heart of this council's ambitions and they will be achieved.

Chairman, we have before us this evening a well prepared, sound budget that meets the statutory requirement of being balanced. However, despite the considerable savings made to date and those projected; along with some additional funding from Government, we still need to increase our council tax. This was not a decision taken lightly, and I appreciate some of the concern expressed by Dorset taxpayers. However, we must do the right thing. We must look after those who need our help. The young people in care and those who need our support to cope with age related health and mobility issues. Without those savings and increases in Council Tax we would have been faced

with the prospect of reductions in discretionary services to balance budgets.

I am hopeful that in future years with the promise of a multi-year settlement from Government in the offing that we will get a better deal for Dorset. As you are aware Chairman, I take very opportunity to be a strong advocate for Dorset with Government. Dorset deserves a better deal. For far too long we have been treated unfairly by successive Governments down the years. I am optimistic that we are making our case well for more central government funding and testament to that optimism was the better than expected settlement for 2022/23 which has enabled some additional commitments on housing; and helped to mitigate risk, underpinning the strength of the budget.

So, Chairman I will conclude by confirming my full support for this budget, as per the recommendations set out in the report before us tonight. This will be a budget that enables this Council to offer the best outcomes overall for the communities we serve. Helping to establish a sound basis on which to take this council forward in a strong, financially sound and structured way; enabling us to fulfil our ambitions to serve the communities of Dorset well, through transformation of council structures and investing in our front-line services. This fits very well with what was promised when Local Government Reorganisation in Dorset was first proposed and subsequently approved.

Thank you, Chairman