

As I normally do in preparation for this meeting, I looked back on my previous responses to the proposed budget of the day and the theme that stands out, despite my various efforts to phrase the same thing in different ways, is that the burden of providing services to our residents and the inequity in having to support a significantly skewed demographic, falls vastly on the resident population of our area.

There is of course an argument that this is genuine local government, where we all pay for what we receive. But it isn't, because what we do pay is via our Council Tax bills, the system which replaced Thatcher's Poll Tax and which is increasingly regressive with regard to property values, takes little account of ability to pay, and is widely regarded as fundamentally unfair.

This budget for a change doesn't take the maximum council tax increase possible, a move presumably designed to try and move Dorset Council down from the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest council tax in the country to somewhere lower in the top 10 but has consequences in both permanently reducing the funding available to this council until it ceases to exist, so forever essentially, and possibly impacting on the success of future funding bids to central government. It also fails to match inflation, with most estimates of UK inflation for the remainder of 2023 and early 2024 averaging out at about 6%.

And because of the nature of Council Tax, the benefit of this decision isn't targeted by any means at all to those most in need. Other councils in England have proposed taking the maximum possible and then been creative in establishing a method of redistribution, acknowledging both the system's failures and the diverse needs of their populations. It is regrettable that this administration didn't propose to do similar but here we are relying on our long suffering residents and phase of the moon dependent government handouts.

I hope that all members of this council have read the 'Forgotten Towns' treatise published last year, highlighting the preventable decline of Weymouth and Portland over the last thirty years with shocking statistics, amongst others, relating to social mobility and how far below the national average wage the area is, with the associated deprivation that brings.

The cry we hear every year is that Dorset doesn't get enough funding from government and yet nothing changes. The RSG is still absent and much of what we do receive involves this council investing considerable time and expense to take part in the current bidding system, where London-based civil servants decide how and where regional money is spent.

Most agree the bidding system is no longer fit for purpose, but we did at least receive notification of £19m in 'levelling up' funding for Weymouth recently.

£19m, which you'd like to think will be spent constructively but in reality, much will go on necessary harbour repairs which previous administrations have failed to carry out due to the failure to reinvest harbour profits, and literally destructively to demolish buildings on land we own in the forlorn hope that it will attract capitalist investment rather than us seizing the opportunity to make a difference to our residents and developing it ourselves. The ghost of 'Charles Street' truly has risen.

And in case you missed it, the funding is just for Weymouth, not Portland; when you take Weymouth out of the equation, Portland's statistics are even worse, yet it receives nothing, and the plague of poverty will continue to spread.

So, we're left as usual with a government that is not only now kwartenging our nurses and doctors, but also its own Tory administrations.

This budget fails to acknowledge or address the damage caused by Trussonomics and turns a blind eye to the demographic timebomb of social care in Dorset, because the current administration won't be in power when it explodes.