

## **Budgets 2024/25 – Seconder response**

### **Fact Over Fiction**

Firstly, can I congratulate Cabinet Member – Gary Suttle and other members of the Cabinet, as well as senior officers Aidan Dunn, Sean Cremer and his team in finance, along with other Service Directors and all those involved, for the excellent work that has been carried out in the preparation of the 2024/25 budget we have before us this evening. This is without doubt Chairman, a well-presented budget; a budget which takes full account of the additional services demand pressures. A soundly based 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 again this year, in what has been a very challenging process. Ensuring we are, once again, able to achieve a balanced budget without the need for reductions in services and with a combined Council Tax and Social Care Precept coming in below the prevailing referendum limit of 5%.

At the January Cabinet meeting Cllr Gary Suttle was able to announce that far from being out of control the in-year overspend had reduced further to £3.5m [1%] of budget with the prospect of break even at the end of the fourth quarter. This improvement is an excellent achievement adding to the confidence members can have in the budget before this evening. The situation we are in does not come by accident nor good fortune and contrasts with neighbouring councils and

across the country who are announcing severe services cuts with increases in council tax and depleting reserves.

One of the members from Weymouth remarked at the recent Cabinet meeting that in his view we had relied upon the intervention and influence of the Lone Ranger chairman.

Well, I am old enough to remember this character with weekly Western films on TV. From what I recall the Lone Ranger was a force for good so maybe his comments were well founded Chairman

However, we must do the right thing. We must look after those who need our help. The young people in care and those with age related health and mobility issues, continue to need our support so they can cope. Without the ongoing benefits of transformation and increases in Council Tax we would have been faced with the prospect of reductions in discretionary services to balance budgets. Thankfully, we continue to avoid such a situation.

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 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 investments in our front-line services. This fits well with the promises made to the people of Dorset when

Local Government Reorganisation was first proposed and subsequently approved by the Government.

Yes, we remain bold and ambitious, and this is demonstrated by the second phases of transformation with the launching of the Our Future Council initiative which will be review structures and processes during the next two to three years, aimed at maintaining strong, structured, and stable finances that Dorset Council is renowned. This is the bedrock for being able to achieve our key priorities as set out in the Dorset Plan and the Cabinet Commitments. In other words, doing the boring bit well in a cost-effective way will always pay dividends.

There are many good reasons to vote in favour of this budget this evening members, and none for voting against. To vote against this budget would be a slap in the face for the people of Dorset because the alternative would be service cuts. I was certainly not election to support services cuts. I am assuming nobody in the chamber this evening was either.

In the financial desert, that is local government currently Chairman, Dorset remains an oasis of stability, confidence, hope and ambition. This is surely the foundation on which we can build for the present and the future for Dorset Council and for the people of Dorset who we all serve.

Support the budget this evening members and show the people of Dorset that you are on their side.

Thank you, Chairman