

Those of us who were councillors prior to 2024 know that this is always challenging, largely because successive Conservative governments have decimated funding to local government, and because Dorset has fared particularly poorly, despite having a full suite of Conservative MPs until last year. And now the Labour government has indirectly walloped us on National Insurance, and so it goes on. Quite simply though, whilst we'll continue to express our consternation and to lobby, we have to serve our residents to the best of our ability regardless.

This is why I voted for last 4 budgets and, subject to this evening's debate, intend to vote for this one. The Green Group doesn't 'whip' – we each vote as our judgement and conscience dictates - but we seek consensus where possible.

On balance, we all intend to support this budget for the following reasons:

- The Lib Dem manifesto which informs it was similar to our own. We too prioritised housing and responding to the climate crisis, but also Children and Young People, which is captured in 'Communities for All' and which I push as a priority through my Cabinet role, and Public Transport, where we continue to push for greater investment
- The transfer of assets and some services to town and parish councils is long overdue, as is the disposal of surplus assets, so we welcome the capital investment which will kick start this process in terms of getting them up to standard
- We also welcome the priority pot, not least because it will enable us to green our fleet and hence contribute significantly to carbon reduction
- And, in uncertain and challenging times, rebuilding reserves which were substantially eroded under the previous administration is surely essential

We also believe that change can be an opportunity as well as a threat. It is vital that we communicate openly and effectively with our staff so they are engaged in rather than alienated by the transformation programme.

In conclusion, we won't all agree with everything in here – Cllr Bawden would like more for buses, Cllr Gibson would like more for Economic Development, I'd like more for Youth Clubs – but we have statutory responsibilities and increasing levels of need within adults' and children's social care, and are obliged to set a balanced budget. In the interests of ALL Dorset residents we have a collective responsibility to prioritise and, on balance, my Green colleagues and I believe this budget does that.

Councillor Clare Sutton

**408 words**