

11th February.

Cllr Kate Wheller, Leader, Labour Group, Rodwell and Wyke Ward.

May I start by thanking Aiden and all the finance team for their work on the budget for 2025/26. A task that becomes more difficult every year.

Each year we complain that the RSG formula does not favour Dorset and representations have not been heard. If I reiterate that sentiment I know there will be sneers from opposition colleagues. However, that is still the case and there has been insufficient time for our new Labour MP's to make any meaningful difference. We must collectively work for those changes over the coming year.

We regularly speak of the low base rate in Weymouth and Portland but actually 51% of Dorset homes are in Bands A – C. Dorset is currently home to a high percentage of over 80's, very many of these are not self funding when they require care. We are seen as rural but we have a large conurbation with high house prices and low wages, where there are jobs at all. All these factors impact on the budget setting process.

Accepting that we are in a difficult position this year and unpalatable decisions need to be made we are alarmed by many of the elements of the budget. Cllr Kimber and I are concerned about the proposed redundancies, we have sought reassurance that loss of staff will be managed sensitively and will not seriously impact upon our ability to deliver services. We will be monitoring this.

Proposals for spending our income across the County seem ill -thought through. We are concerned at how small the budget is for supporting business and creating jobs. We believe this should be given a greater priority. Growing our local economy is our way out of our difficulties, both financial and social. We know this and yet still this administration insists on woolly aspiration completely devoid of all substance.

We pride ourselves on the diverse cultural offer across the County, and yet we intend to charge to park at night. That will seriously impact not just Weymouth but all our towns. Suggesting that a season ticket will mitigate, is I am afraid nonsense. Many of our residents will simply stop coming into town at all. No

increased revenue for the Council and reduced income for our businesses. We are selling assets, sometimes rightly so, but let's look more imaginatively at how those assets could create more sustainable wealth.

I cannot support a budget that will impact so heavily upon the Counties night-time economy., and pays so little attention to investment for growth.

Please colleagues when agreeing this budget do not just grab at the quick wins think more imaginatively with more true vision. The Liberal Democrats promised a new broom, would they like me to buy one.

Thank you.