

## **BUDGET SPEECH – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

I find it a real privilege to present the council's budget for 2023/24 as the Leader of the Council.

It is a budget that will look after the best interests of the New Forest residents and Council Tax payers, not only in the next financial year, but also over many years to come.

It is because of the pro-active and prudent way in which the conservative administration has dealt with financial constraints over the years that we are still able to invest in new and enhanced services today.

Through our Resident survey we have listened to what our residents have told us their priorities are and I am pleased to be able to see our budget bring forward spending to support a cleaner, greener and safer New Forest.

In this budget, we are able to commit to three hundred thousand pounds (£300,000) in 2023/24 of investment in enhanced Community Safety measures, further enhancing the feeling of safety within our various communities.

We are able to invest one million pounds (£1 million) over the next 4 years in Climate action measures, to improve on the Council's carbon position, and improve the quality of the local environment we all enjoy so much.

The budget invests seven hundred and fifty thousand pounds (£750,000) over the next 3 years in Council wide transformation. This programme will deliver improved and more efficient services to the residents and customers of the New Forest and will make a valuable contribution in addressing the Council's forecast deficit over the Medium Term.

We have set aside seven million pounds (£7 million) to invest in a new depot facility to safeguard the waste management services for the foreseeable future. This investment will play a huge part in supporting significant improvements to recycling rates and the achievement of the Council's climate action plan.

Over the next 3 years we are able to invest over 11 million pounds (£11 million) on upgraded vehicles and plant, replacing older and less economical models with a new greener and more efficient fleet.

I am also immensely proud of our track record as a housing landlord, with five thousand one hundred and eighty five (5,185) Council owned homes providing affordable housing for those who most need it. The ring-fenced housing revenue account supports the management and maintenance of these properties as well as our ambitious programme to build more affordable homes.

For the housing revenue account, the budget includes proposed investment of over forty five million pounds (£45 million) over the next 3 years in additional council owned housing.

This budget also includes an ability to spend forty seven million pounds (£47 million) in planned, reactive and cyclical maintenance also over the next 3 years, protecting the Council's assets, but more importantly, protecting the well loved homes of our six thousand four hundred and sixty three (6,463) named tenants.

The General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets presented to you this evening do not shy away from tough decisions that need to be taken on tax, rent and charges.

Our proposed band D Council Tax for the year is often lost in the overall scale of the Council Tax bill. A bill that also includes the precepts from the County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Fire and Rescue Authority and, where applicable the Town and Parish Council.

This Council's proposed Council Tax charge per typical band D property is one hundred and ninety three pounds and ninety nine pence (£193.99) for the year; this is just three pounds and seventy two pence (£3.72) per week. It would take me too long to mention all of the invaluable services that this council provides for that modest weekly sum.

The proposed housing rent increase of 7% provides the necessary increase in income required to fund the increased statutory resident engagement matters, and significant maintenance and capital programmes, including over one point two million pounds (£1.2 million) of greener housing initiatives for next year alone.

The fees that we charge for our services have to recognise that the Council's costs have increased. We need growth in fees and charges to help pay for the services we provide and to enable us to do more as we look forward into the future.

Councillors, that is what a conservative administration budget does,

it looks forward to the future

It is based on sound information,

and doesn't look to introduce vote winning gimmicks or ill thought through plans.

I fully endorse the recommendations as outlined in the reports of the Cabinet.

I give you a budget that is fit for now, and a budget that is fit for a vibrant future New Forest.

Thank you.