



An Independent View Ron Woodley

Dear Residents

Having taken over the reins at Southend-on-Sea Council last year, I feel it is necessary to once again highlight the financial deficiencies that I faced as the new leader of the council. The double hit on council revenues of £125 million over a 5 year period between central government cuts and the financing costs caused by the local Conservatives borrowing levels is staggering. I have taken action in next year's budget and have reduced the planned debt levels of the Conservatives by £38 million, already reduced the debt by over £10 million and thereby saved £2.6 million in financing costs.

Therefore, because of the continuing reduction in government funding and the extreme financing costs caused by the previous Conservative administration's level of borrowing, there is little choice but to propose an average council tax increase of 42 pence a week, 10 pence more than the conservative's intentions. I have not taken this decision lightly and appreciate that local people have also been impacted by the austerity measures.

Efficiency improvements, coupled with management and service restructuring, is essential, not just for today, but for the longer term. The Council needs a new perspective in managing the business, by identifying services that are or will not be needed both now and in the future.

There is no doubt that incredibly difficult decisions have to be taken. It is inevitable that as further cuts and financing costs bite in future years, the decisions will get tougher and tougher. It is no longer possible to just keep making efficiency savings here and there. Very stark choices about services or charges to generate income have to be made. This must be done against a backdrop of increased demand for some services, such as adult social care.

Delaware & Priory House Care Homes - There are positive elements of the budget and I am delighted to announce that not only is Priory House staying open, but the first steps to invest in adult social care services are taking shape in making this important area sustainable for the future. In addition I intend to build a new 60 bed dementia care home, extra care sheltered housing and a day centre for the town's severely disabled adults, to ensure they receive quality care by Southend-on-Sea trained staff. I am also putting into the budget £1.135 million of addition funding for our elderly people and adults with disabilities. Our older population have served the town well over the years and now it is my intention to see the Council serve and look after them.



There will also be major investments and closer working with our public health partners with major enhancement of services which will see more support for people living with chronic long term health conditions. We will also see increased funding for our younger people to ensure our children in care are able to stay longer with their foster families. Overall, I can say that whilst the demands on adult social care, children's services and housing continues to grow, I will have achieved one of my aims in protecting these front line services which also includes building our first of many council homes.