



Independent Community & Health Concern



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ICHC Alternative Budget Restores Tory's Cuts.

The **Independent Community & Health Concern** alternative council budget, announced today, has suggested restoring £200k of cuts detailed in the Tory Budget at an additional cost to council tax payers of just 5 pence per week.

ICHC have sought to put back expenditure that benefits the elderly and disabled, helps the community in a time of economic uncertainty, looks after public health issues and promotes the local economy.

- Taxi tokens and support for “Dial-a-Ride” will be retained and funding will be continued for an Access Officer to ensure compliance locally with the Disability Discrimination Act.

“The removal of these areas of support would have impacted severely on the elderly who benefit from taxi tokens and the elderly and disabled who rely on Dial-a-Ride as their main means of transport and lifeline with the outside world.” said ICHC Leader, Cllr Howard Martin. “The suggestion that they could all cope by using local buses is not practical for many affected and shows a lack of sensitivity and understanding on the part of the Council Leadership.”

- Funding is restored for free rat and other pest control - ***“ensuring the control of rats is not only done though an ability to pay for the service is essential for Public Health”*** said Cllr Martin.
- £40k will be put back into Economic Development to help promote the local economy and tourism at a time when it is suffering most through the economic downturn.
- Also, the Community Leadership Fund of £42k will be retained enabling Councillors to offer £1000 each to help small community projects in their Wards.
- The proposal to cut the Parish Council subsidy from next year will also be reversed potentially saving residents of Bewdley, Stourport and the village parishes additional local council tax rises to offset the loss. ***“This was back door taxation by the Tories and an attempt to transfer District Council costs onto the Town and Parish Councils”*** said Martin.
- It is also suggested that cuts to ground maintenance services are rethought and consideration given to enhanced cooperation with the Community Housing Group – the effect being proposed job losses could be avoided and partnership working strengthened.

- Also, the “high demand team”, due to be scrapped, that keeps the area tidy and free from litter as part of Street Scene at times of high tourist activity will be saved .
- ***“We would also shelve the proposal to build new council offices as inappropriate at this time. To go ahead now when council and other jobs are being lost and local people suffering so badly would be breathtakingly reckless by this council and an insult to the community at large. This immediately releases £400k of Revenue reserves back into the Budget to public benefit and reduces the risk of financial disaster if the estimated costs, growing all the time, are exceeded and need to be passed onto the community.”*** said Cllr Martin. ***“Surely our first responsibility is to the public who deserve quality services and our employees who deserve to keep their jobs? These are a greater priority than the obsessive continuation of a flawed political dream of luxury council offices.”***
- **ICHC** have also included funding in their proposals to offset the loss of revenue income should the council decide to go ahead with the affordable house building programme suggested two weeks ago. A formal paper will be put to Council outlining how this would operate but it cannot be submitted until similar proposals, subsequently outlined by the Prime Minister, are finalised and put before Parliament since legislation may ultimately affect the way council would be part of any such scheme.

“Our proposals save some council jobs and services essential to the most vulnerable and needy sectors of our community. They cost an extra 5p per week per household, which equates to a 3.9% increase on the WFDC element of local council tax – this raises over £600k over the next 3 years which can be used solely to the benefit of the local community.

“In proposing his budget Cllr Campion said his was just one option and he was prepared to look at others – this is another sustainable and affordable option – I hope he keeps his word and gives it due consideration. We will remain flexible in our proposals if compromise between us is a reality.” concluded Cllr Martin.

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