

## Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum Consultation Response to TWBC Budget 2018/19

Finance Working Group's Response to Budget 2018/19	Council Response
	We are very grateful for the constructive input from the Town Forum.
<p>We have looked at your Budget for 2018/19, and we note that whilst it is balanced, i.e. reserves are left intact, this is the last year in which this is likely to be the case. You set out several scenarios which will enable you to balance future budgets, but in each case we see very great imponderables. Thus, revenue support grant cannot be relied upon (if anything this could get even smaller), the new homes bonus, retention of business rates etc., are all at the mercy of central government dictat and in view of your commitment to very large borrowing in the next fifty years, causes us great concern.</p>	<p>The medium-term quantum of funding will become more certain after 2019/20 when the Government completes a Comprehensive Spending review. The Government has been clear that future funding will be directed to areas that deliver growth. Councils that invest in their areas and encourage others to do so will be better placed to meet the challenges ahead.</p>
<p>Turning to staff matters, we see a reduction in staff numbers (as expressed in Full Time Equivalent hours) but are concerned that you still need to have specialist skills for the future. We seek re-assurance that the specialist staff for the new Civic Complex will be retained to take the project forward, should planning permission be granted,, but we also note that there is no mention of the Civic Complex costs, and we ascribe this to the fact that no costs will arise in 2018/19.</p>	<p>The reduction in staffing numbers since 2010 reflects the reduction in government funding. The table under 2.22 shows that staffing numbers have increased on last year albeit as a result of greater partnership working and acting as the host employer. Partnership working also provides greater resilience than if the Council delivers services in isolation.</p> <p>The Civic Complex will not significantly impact on the 2018/19 budget but under 2.24 there is a line showing £1million of expenditure associated with this project which will cover the consultancy costs of Stage 4.</p>
<p>We are confused by the statement on Page 51, section 2,27 “ that this council will increase council tax by £5 a year”, yet in the next section 2.28 you say “ that the headline level of council tax will be £173.57 ( 48pence per day) which is an increase of £4.98. Do you mean 4.98 % ? We now understand that TWBC is excused from following the national</p>	<p>The reference to £5 is from the Government. The whole sentence reads “The Government has assumed in their ‘spending power’ calculations that this Council will increase council tax by £5 a year.’</p> <p>The increase will be £4.98 which is 3 per cent, subject to approval by Full Council.</p>

restriction of only 2% increase in council tax, since we start from such a low point with our council tax, so our restriction is £5. If you feel that this paragraph needs expansion to make this clear, then you might like to change it.	The new 'Council tax flexibility' of 3 per cent is of no consequence to this Council.
We are pleased that your efforts to reduce costs are paying off, especially in Postage and gas usage, and that you rental income is going up.	Noted.
Whilst balancing the budget in financial terms has been achieved, the means by which this has been done are not mentioned. The cuts in grants to your councillors, to the CAB, Trinity and Cranbrook museum and a host of smaller bodies, are deeply resented across the community. Your effort to ameliorate the effect on these small entities that they should look to the new TW Lotto is risible, since TW Lotto can pay out at a maximum, only £30,000 at present. We ask you to maintain these grants in full, until such time as the Lotto is capable of paying out at least £250,000 annually. We understand that you are encouraging small bodies in receipt of grant, to become more independent of the Council: would turning to sponsorship be another source of funds ?	<p>This budget report relates to 2018/19 and maintains the financial commitments in place with the grant recipients despite government support for this Council being cut to zero.</p> <p>The lottery has only been in operation for six months and those organisations that have embraced this scheme are generating returns which are stable and grow unlike relying on Council funding.</p>
Last year you set out a list of priorities. We have revisited them this year, to see how you are getting on. You have certainly reached a Stage 2 HLF bid for the cultural hub, and you have developed a scheme for the new theatre. But "remove from our Town the dictatorship over our lives which the motor car has come to represent"?, whilst proposing to build an underground car park at a cost of £15m ? And extend the Crescent Road car park? Also, "continue to develop opportunities for business to locate and grow"? whilst at the same time issuing CPOs against some of the Towns' biggest employers, because they question your plans for the new complex? Also, proposing to rent out some floors of the new civic complex, whilst leaving empty, floors of office	<p>The Council has commissioned a Park and Ride study with Kent County Council. The results are expected at the end of March 2018. The Council has also been consulted on the Kent and Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework which looks to address transport and other strategic issues.</p> <p>This budget report relates to 2018/19.</p> <p>Comments relating to the Civic Complex are explained within the Civic Development Delivery Report which was approved by Full Council on 6 December 2017.</p>

space in the present Town Hall?	
<p>We reiterate what we said last year, that your priorities are not in line with those of your residents. Examples of this are several, amongst which we signal out the need for rented low cost housing for key workers. Other local authorities are already doing this. If the cost of borrowing is so low, why not borrow to provide rented low cost housing for key workers? The rate of return will be at least 5%, so you should easily cover your costs, and in addition provide yourself with a sizeable cash flow. And with a scheme which appeals to all your residents.</p>	<p>The priorities in the Five Year Plan were subject to widespread consultation and were agreed by Full Council.</p> <p>The Government has admitted that the housing market is broken and short-term solutions often have negative consequences for others such as driving up prices. Ultimately the high demand for housing will only be addressed by building more housing which is the requirement of the Local Plan Review.</p>