

Madam Chairman over past few weeks we have heard a lot about “shock”. Well I can think of another word beginning with SH to describe the Budgetary process we are going through – Shambles. In fact a Conservative shambles, from the Conservative Government down to Surrey’s Conservative leadership.

Does anyone in this Chamber actually believe that the funding of a key public bodies responsible for billions of pounds of public money and the provision of key services to every single resident in the country should be at the whim of a provisional Ministerial decision just before Christmas which is finally confirmed in the week of – or in Surrey’s case on the evening before - the Budget setting meeting.

And when that Revenue Support Grant decision actually fails the test of fairness, and is based of broken promises and unreasonable expectations it makes a mockery of financial planning and can only be described as a procedural shambles. And whilst we have to thankful for the change of heart by the Minister, brought about by the lobbying of many councils of all political groups including Residents Association and Independents, we also have to be seriously concerned about the thinking that lay behind the original decision making. If indeed thinking was actually involved.

That said madam Chairman the leadership of SCC cannot get off lightly. Their budgetary procedures hardly stand out as good practice.

Much was made of how Scrutiny Boards would be set up to scrutinise service budgets and come up with savings. And what a shambles that has been. Denied of any meaningful data or serious options for savings – the Boards came up with virtually nothing. Another case Madam Chairman of where desire outlived performance.

But of course there was never going to be any meaningful data or detailed plans until the Budget is passed - because that is not the Tory way. And that of course is equally true of today’s budget. Headline figures big on numbers, unacceptably low on detail.

So today we are being asked to agree a Council Tax rise without any information on how that will affect the provision of individual services to residents. Where else but in Surrey are council taxpayers told to pay up before they know the deal? A trust me I’m a politician budget”.

But as a Budget process it is not good enough – it never was, and never will be. It is not open and it is not transparent, and over the next few months the Residents Association and Independent Group of County Councillors will work to improve the effectiveness of Scrutiny Boards in the lead up to the 2017/2018 Budget. I make that commitment as an offer that I hope Mr Hodge will take up.

Madam Chairman I won’t be voting for this Conservative Budget without the detail. Our residents deserve much better than this.

***County Councillor Eber A Kington***