

## 13/02/18 BBC CWR Breakfast – John Mutton & Trish Adudu

TA: ...we can speak to Cllr John Mutton, we've got hold of him now. Despite the bleak outlook the Council has pledged to protect frontline services from further cuts over the next twelve months. Well we'll speak to Cllr John Mutton now, Cabinet Member for strategic finance and resources at Coventry City Council. Morning John

JM: Morning Trish

TA: Is this Council Tax rise really necessary?

JM: Oh absolutely – erm – since 2010 the government have reduced our rate support grant by 113million pounds but people still want services from the Council and they have to be paid for, so it is absolutely necessary we have a council tax increase. I should point out though that our increase is lower than most – it's 1.9% from the council element of it and 3% from the government to pay for adult social care

TA: Yeah that's all very well, that's all very well, but try telling that to a family who is struggling as it is er on to pay their charges or their money, and they're gonna see the Council Tax rise to £90, an extra £90

JM: No no no, that's for a band D

TA: Yeah well...

JM: No I'm sorry Trish...

TA: Yeah but I'm sorry...

JM: I have to correct you, that's for a band D

TA: Yes, okay

JM: The majority of houses in this city are band A and B which means, erm, roughly £50 a year. One pound a week increase.

TA: Okay but there are people listening who live in a Band D home. Now why don't you use reserves to plug the funding gap? You have got these reserves and you can use them. Why aren't you going there?

JM: Because the economy's a madhouse and once you spend the reserves they're gone but you've still got the same problem, you know the problem of not having sufficient money, you know to pay the wages of the staff, to provide the services that people of Coventry want. We've always fought against using one off reserves to fund ongoing expenditure. The reserves have been used to buy assets that generate income for the Council

TA: Such as - ?

JM: Er, Coombe Abbey, that will generate £1million pounds a year, um, the industrial estate on Quinton Road, that will bring in about £400,000 a year um so that brings in ongoing revenue

TA: But do people really care about that if that means there's a hike in what they're going to be paying, their Council Tax. Are they telling you that they really want these services, is that what they're telling you?

JM: Yes! We get phonecalls and emails everyday

TA: Well how many phonecalls do you get saying we don't mind our Council Tax going up as long as Coombe Abbey looks better I don't understand?

JM: No I didn't say that. Your question Trish,

TA: Yeah

JM: Was do people really want these services and the answer is yes.

TA: What about pensioners? Iris in Tile Hill's called with a specific question; can you please ask John Mutton how the increase will affect pensioners?

JM: Well it depends on their circumstances if pensioners are reasonably well off then they will pay the full increase of £1 a week, for the majority of people. If they get Council Tax rebates because of low income they'll pay considerably less. And the poorest people in Coventry, who only have to pay 15% of their Council Tax, that works out at 15pence a week.

TA: okay. Alright Terry in Stoke's called in wants to know why landlords of student properties don't get charged council tax because their properties are exempt at the moment

JM: Yeah and we recently took a notice of motion to Full Council demanding that landlords of student properties should have to pay business rates because that's what it is, and unfortunately um the MP for Nuneaton whose responsibility it is refused to do that in parliament only a month or so ago

TA: Do you not understand people's frustrations John, we are paying more and seeing less services, our bins are collected less, the lighting, street lights are going off earlier, do you understand people's frustration?

JM: Of course I understand the frustration

TA: So what are you doing about it?

JM: Ask the government to refund the £107million they've stolen from Coventry

TA: It's easy to blame the government, you're the council, what are you doing about it?

JM: I think what we're doing about it is that we've managed to put a budget together with a lower increase than most councils, because most councils have gone for a 5.9% increase, the maximum they're entitled to under legislation, and we're not making any new cuts this year. I'm having Council's up and down the country contacting me, asking how Coventry's managed to do this.

TA: Well that's all very well, but like I say, people having to fork out an extra £50 quid for services they're not seeing, What about Moorland, Moorland has been in touch with us and is asking what

about these elaborate projects like swimming pools? They're just ego trips at our expense. What would you say to someone like him?

JM: What I would say is that we gave a commitment when we were forced to close Fairfax Street down because of the cost of running it, we gave a commitment that we'd continue to try and provide a 50metre pool. We've met that commitment. That's what the people of Coventry wanted and they sent in a massive petition to the Council asking for that, so we have delivered what the people of Coventry asked us to deliver

TA: Okay so where's the good news in all of this? What will see an increase of services, what services have you ringfenced and protected with this Council Tax hike?

JM: We've protected children's services, which unfortunately is a demand led service and the number of children in care of the local authority has gone up considerably in the last year, which is a national situation as well - and we've protected all of the services, as I said not five minutes ago, there are no new cuts in this year's budget.

TA: Okay what about the people listening this morning who are absolutely at their wits end, who do not know where they're going to find this extra fifty quid or if they live in a band d home this extra ninety quid. What help are you going to giving to people who are struggling, at this moment to make ends meet?

JM: If people are struggling, then they are entitled to apply for Council Tax rebate, which means that for those that are in full receipt of council tax rebate the increase is 15 pence per week, that's the only increase for people that are really struggling and are entitled to council tax rebate.

TA: And have you got any idea how many people that is in Coventry?

JM: Not off the top of my head no I haven't

TA: Yeah, because I mean like I say, as soon as people heard about this you know there's so many people that have phoned in incredibly angry as you'd expect , you know the second increase, again in April, this time by you know like you say by 4.9%. Is this going to be it, Cllr John Mutton, are we gonna see another increase next year?

JM: No, because 3% of that as I've already explained is down to the government abdicating themselves from their responsibilities of funding adult social care and for last year and this year they told us to add on 3% to the Council Tax, to pay for adult social care. This is the last year.

TA: Okay. Well like I say we are getting some very angry and frustrated listeners this morning. Still unsure at to what they are getting for this extra council tax rise. Is there an email if people do want to further get some more answers this morning. Who do they go to, where do they go?

JM: Yeah if they send an email to me at the council house – [john.mutton@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:john.mutton@coventry.gov.uk) and I'll be delighted to answer their questions

TA: What if they don't have email?

JM: Well I can't sit there by a phone all day waiting for people to phone up, I can answer their emails or they can send a letter in and I'll send them a written response

TA: Okay, alright. Thanks very much Cllr John Mutton, Cabinet Member for strategic finance and resources at Coventry City Council...