

COUNCIL LEADER INTRODUCTION

Like most local authorities, we are finding it increasingly difficult to deliver a balanced budget in the face of continued government austerity cuts to our funding.

Councils have borne the brunt of the Government's public sector cuts. Here in Warrington we have had to make savings in our revenue budget of £159m since 2010 – the equivalent of almost £1,696 per household that would have been spent on services for you, our residents. Throughout this period we have done our utmost to protect the most vulnerable people across the borough and those services that you value most.

We still face a significant budget challenge and by 2021 we must save at least another £14 million. We will continue to do all we can to protect essential services, such as social care for vulnerable children and adults, while also doing our best to maintain other services such as waste and recycling collection, street cleaning and highways maintenance – but it won't be easy.

Warrington is already one of the lowest funded unitary authorities outside London and your council tax remains one of the lowest in the North West. We have reducing budgets on one hand and the increasing demands of an ageing population on the other. Even this year's increase won't plug the gap – the amount we receive in council tax each year doesn't even cover the costs of social care and children's services.

We are doing all we can to reduce our own costs and to raise extra revenue to put back into frontline services. Our aim is to make sure these pressures are well managed so that local residents, particularly the most vulnerable ones, are protected from the worst effects of the cuts.

We've also been listening to what you have been telling us, and this is helping us to continually improve our services, making them more efficient and accessible.

We won't always be able to provide the same level of service as we have done in the past, and there may be wider reaching changes this year in terms of what we can provide as a council to our residents. We need to prepare for the eventuality that the most difficult budget decisions are still ahead of us.

Despite these ongoing pressures, Warrington is already a place to be proud of, and together we can make it even better.

Councillor Russ Bowden

Leader, Warrington Borough Council