



# TRIDENT TIMES

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*The Official Newsletter of the  
Weston-super-Mare Senior Citizens Forum  
(a non-political organisation)*

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## "COUNCIL TAX & RESERVES"

First, the good news – there will be NO INCREASE in the council tax levied by North Somerset Council, or by our Town Council this year - not exactly exciting stuff. What would be exciting would be Asda, Tesco and Morrison's all saying their prices would be frozen for a year but no chance of that!

However, let us take North Somerset Council. First of all, having received huge cuts in Government grant which they have addressed by reducing and restructuring services in the current year, there is no doubt we will feel the effect of those cuts in the coming year. Plus, another £14million needs to be saved in 2012/13.

Whilst nationally we seem to find a lot of money to give away or spend, such as £12billion for foreign aid, £27billion in uncollected fines and taxes, a few more million for the Olympics, £150million for removing faulty breast implants, £40million in bonuses for Ministry of Defence workers (not for our serving men and women). The list goes on and one is forced to believe that the only shortage of cash is the cash in our pockets – we are definitely not all in this together!

The Town Council are also holding their council tax steady for 2012/13, but, to be honest, I had hoped for a reduction in this. Now that may seem to be unheard of so let me explain. First of all, town councils do not receive any Government grant because the only public services a town or parish council has is a statutory duty to provide allotments and that only costs around £13,000 a year – not much out of the £1.176million they raise in council tax. However, they have taken on

other non-statutory responsibilities such as the Blakehay, Barcode, Museum, Water Park, etc, and I have no problem with that, except that they do seem to take over buildings which are in constant need of extensive repairs.

However, I digress. A few years ago the town council put its council tax up by 44%, to enable them to increase their reserves which had been depleted by a previous administration and stood at a mere £25,000 (way below what the auditor required). Increasing the town council tax by 44% was intended to address that shortfall but, of course, that large increase remained and has been added to over the years. Now, the town council has over £1million in reserves, almost one year's trading, and I would suggest that this is more than the auditor would expect. The £1million reserves is, of course, our money so you could say that we have been overcharged £1million for the services we receive. As that £1million does not attract much interest these days, it would have been good to have seen a reduction in our council tax. If they had knocked just £300,000 off the reserves they would still have ample and we would have paid £12 less in council tax.

Maybe we will get a reduction the year they come up for election?

## OUR NEXT MEETING – 1st FEBRUARY

Our speaker this time will be the Deputy Leader of North Somerset Council, Councillor Elfan ap Rees, who is also the Executive Member of the Council's largest department. His portfolio covers planning, sea defences, highways, bus services, some waste management and, of course, he headed the Tropicana Committee.

Elfan ap Rees can be slightly controversial at times who is not known to pull his punches. A large slice of Council cuts fall on his department with bus service subsidies alone taking a £350,000 cut which will affect a number of local services. These services are supported by Government Revenue Support Grant which, as I have mentioned before, has been drastically cut back. This should be a very interesting meeting.

### THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

As no-one was prepared to come forward to take on the responsibilities of Chairman or Secretary a compromise had to be found. It was decided that Linda and I would carry on but with reduced meetings and newsletters. As a result, with effect from Wednesday 1st February 2012, we will now be holding meetings once every two months and sending out the newsletters every two months from the end of January.

This will still keep the forum going and we will do our best to continue to be as informative and controversial as ever. We are sorry about this change but, due to health problems, it has been necessary to reduce our workload. All other Committee members remain unchanged, although a working party has been formed to look into the future of the Forum but, as yet, we have not been able to meet.

One item heavily debated at the AGM was the production of the Trident Times and I would like to clarify how this is produced.

I, your Chairman, write a draft copy which is then put into some form of English by my wife, Linda. Following a bit of going backwards and forwards between the two of us, a master copy is eventually designed and produced by Linda. This copy, together with the printed labels, is passed to our Vice-Chairman, Margaret, who runs off all the copies, pops them into envelopes, sticks on the labels, franks them and delivers them all to the post office. Linda emails a copy to our computer literate members who have provided their email addresses.

### PENSIONERS' MEANS-TESTING

As stated recently in the press, our Deputy Prime Minister wants to see more so called wealthy pensioners means-tested on our so-called perks or benefits, whilst, as pensioners, we have been fighting for years to get means-testing abolished. What the Deputy Prime Minister is suggesting is that we are means-tested on bus passes and winter fuel allowance when we are over a certain level of income.

Figures of wealthy pensioners have been grossly over-estimated for years, so let us look at the statistics which show a very different picture.

Six million are living on an income where they do not pay income tax, four million pay just the standard rate of income tax and only 400,000 pay the higher rate. So, to take away the bus pass and the fuel allowance from the top 400,000 pensioners is not going to raise a large amount of money. How many of them would use a bus pass anyway?

If the Deputy Prime Minister is looking for serious money to save then he would have to include pensioners on a much lower income. We have always argued that the cost of administering means-testing is huge and out of proportion to the benefit received.

I would suggest that Mr Clegg should look again, he will find it may cost him more money than it saves if he tries to muck about with the system – unless, of course, he wants to abolish means-testing altogether.

# END OF THE ROAD FOR THE TROPICANA?

*I don't think so!*

The Council are going to demolish the Tropicana in the vain hope that they will be able to draw a line under it and move on. That is what they hope and as it is two years until the next election they are hoping you will have forgotten all about it by 2014.

To me the Tropicana is like the appalling MPs' expenses scandal, you don't forget or forgive such a scandalous action. The fight for Tropicana will continue for as long as it takes and if some local councillors don't understand that then they probably won't be in office after the next election!

A new organisation has been formed by a group of successful and influential businessmen and women in Weston called "Trop Ltd",. The group aim to deliver this project by empowering local people and organisations which may include using the Government's Asset Transfer Unit who have a focus on transferring under-used land and buildings.

The group have already submitted proposals for this community based project to North Somerset Council and feel that the demolition recommendation should be delayed in order to allow the group and Council to sit down and review the group's proposals for the regeneration of the Tropicana to deliver pool and leisure facilities.

This will also allow a review of the Council's responsibility under the "Localism Act", as the group consider that the local community have not been

consulted correctly over the working party's recommendations for demolition.

There is a community style pool running successfully in Portishead. Although the Tropicana is a much larger venture and would require a substantial financial input from North Somerset Council, who just want to see the back of the Tropicana even though the public demand is there which means that, unfortunately, the Council's will is sadly lacking. Regrettably it is also the case when Weston has to rely on the rest of the District to help fund a local facility. To suggest that the town council should fund the Tropicana is unreasonable and unrealistic because the cost factor would place a huge financial burden on local council tax payers. This cost must be spread across the whole of the District as the majority of services are. A new Tropicana would be a District facility which would be shared by all. In addition it would attract outside visitors and this would be to the benefit of the District as a whole.

It has been muted that many older people, who probably would not use a new Tropicana are amongst the strongest campaigners for its redevelopment and that is true. Most of us oldies remember what a magical and wonderful place the old pool was when we were youngsters. The happy memories we still have of our school holidays in the pool are the same memories we would like our grandchildren and great grandchildren to experience and share. Those were unforgettable days.

***DON'T LET THE TROPICANA DIE!!!***

## WESTON-SUPER-MARE SENIOR CITIZENS FORUM CONTACTS

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**DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

**WEDNESDAY 1<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY – 2.00pm**

**UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HALL  
Waterloo Street, Weston-super-Mare**

**GUEST SPEAKER:**

**COUNCILLOR ELFAN AP REES  
Deputy Leader of North Somerset Council**

**TOPIC:**

**“HOW GOVERNMENT CUTS  
AFFECT OUR COUNCIL”**

**CARE IN CRISIS”**

Age UK is running a campaign on “Care in the Community which is an area that has received cuts and is causing problems for the vulnerable elderly.

Last year there was a 4½% cut in real terms on the previous year (2010/11) but whilst the cash is going down the number of older people with care related needs is growing.

On average per year some 42,000 older people are not receiving care help anymore because local authorities are restricting access to care to those with higher needs. Nearly 80% of local authorities have set their eligibility threshold at “substantial” and a further 3% set their threshold at “critical”.

Funding care for the elderly is a growing problem, as is the cost to the users of the service. 44% of older people have to buy in additional care services to top up the care provided by their local authority. On average, for each older person receiving these services, that costs almost £2,000 more

The Government will be bringing out a new White Paper in the Spring and, as the Age UK campaign is focused on the possible outcome of the Government’s decisions, we need to make our voice heard. A petition form will be available at our next meeting so please sign it to enable us to register the concerns of our members.

**EMAIL ADDRESS – “FRIENDLY REMINDER”**

**DON’T FORGET** - if you have a computer and an email address, please let Linda have your details so that Trident Times can be emailed to you to save on our printing and postage costs. (email: ken@westonscf.co.uk)

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