

The government's Autumn Statement last week contained no good news for local councils or council tax payers.

Yes, there was some additional funding for social care but we don't know how much St Helens will receive yet. And there was no announcement at all about funding for councils as a whole. That news is due sometime before Christmas, so we will have to wait to see whether ministers have listened to the warnings from councils all across the country – including Tory councils – of the dire situation facing local government.

Several councils have gone bankrupt in recent years because of underfunding and rising demand on services, and more will follow unless government change their approach.

The main announcement for local councils last week was that government will encourage councils to raise council tax by 5% to generate funding for social care and other essential services.

It's absolutely the wrong approach. Not only is it deeply unfair to residents already facing a cost of living crisis, but it doesn't even raise enough to cover the funding crisis we face.

Every 1% rise in St Helens raises about £866,000, so about £4.3m for a full 5% rise. But St Helens faces a funding gap of £14million, so even a full rise in council tax will mean we still need to make cuts.

And if we don't raise council tax by 5%, we'd have to cut another £4.3m from essential services.

It's been this way for 12 years, and it's an impossible situation. In an ideal world government would provide fair funding so we could freeze or even cut council tax, but – as we've learnt since 2010 – with this government things are always less than ideal.

We'll wait for the funding announcement in December and hope for good news, and in the meantime we'll continue to do all we can to help people.

This week we've been advertising a directory of warm spaces across the borough over the winter. It's disgusting that in this country in 2022 we're having to organise such things, but thank God there are so many kind people in St Helens willing to work tirelessly to help others in the absence of a functioning or caring government.

If you need support please reach out. Visit www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether for all the latest information, advice and support.

Best wishes to all Star readers.