

North Devon Conservatives

t (Press) 01271 344300

Date: 11 May 2009

Whitehall must give North Devon a fairer deal and help freeze council tax

Calls to cut back on Government spin and waste to stop council tax rises

Philip Milton, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for North Devon, today called for wasteful government spending on advertising and public sector consultants to be cut – in order to free up funds to help freeze council tax bills in North Devon. Local taxpayers in Scotland have benefited from a council tax freeze yet again this year.

- **Soaring council tax under Labour:** Council tax in England has rocketed by 105% - or an extra £726 a year - since Labour came to power. In North Devon, council tax bills have risen by £887 or 142% a year. But Scotland is enjoying another council tax freeze this year; council tax bills are now £265 a year less in Scotland than in England on a Band D home.
- **Conservatives pledge to freeze council tax:** A Conservative Government would follow the Scottish example and work in partnership with local councils, giving them extra support so that they can freeze council tax bills. Over two years, new analysis shows that this would save a typical family in North Devon £231 in tax. The cost to central government of reducing council tax would be met by spending less on government advertising and on public sector consultants.
- **Wages of spin:** Despite the strain on public finances, government advertising shot up by 20% in 2008 alone. The Government is now the second biggest advertiser in the UK, just behind Procter & Gamble. Public relations, marketing and advertising now costs the taxpayer a colossal £400 million a year. Gordon Brown spent £54 million more of taxpayers' money on advertising in his first year than Tony Blair in his last year. The Government is also planning to spend £4 billion on consultants over the next 3 years.
- **Wasteful advertising:** Conservatives have put together a dossier highlighting examples of wasteful advertising, including: spinning a new 'policing pledge' at a time when many police forces are cutting police officers; running a 'minimum wage Battlebus' that only tours Labour areas; designing animated cartoons to sell

Published and promoted by Sir Richard Peek on behalf of the NDCA, The Strand, Barnstaple, N. Devon
EX31 1EU. Tel 01271 343101

discredited 'eco-towns'; export campaign adverts that run in Britain rather than abroad; and neighbourhood policing adverts explicitly intended to prop up Labour's local elections campaign.

Philip said:

"Under Labour, council tax has soared across the country, pushing up the cost of living and hiking bills in North Devon by 142%. Families and pensioners facing the economic squeeze just cannot afford yet more tax rises from Gordon Brown. If Scotland can freeze council tax for its residents, so can we south of the border. It's time to give North Devon a fairer deal.

"We can fund a freeze for hard-pressed council taxpayers by cutting Whitehall spending on government advertising and unnecessary public sector consultants. These changes will also help undo Labour's damaging culture of spin and restore the integrity of civil servants in Whitehall."

Notes to Editors

SOARING SPENDING ON ADVERTISING AND CONSULTANTS

The attached dossier highlights soaring and wasteful government expenditure on advertising.

<http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Downloadable%20Files/GovernmentAdvertising.ashx?dl=true> (PDF file).

Spending on consultants is also set to soar. In 2007-08, consultancy spend across central government was estimated to be £909 million (*Letter from Sir Gus O'Donnell to Public Administration Select Committee*, 11 March 2009).

The Government is currently tendering for a 'Framework Agreement' which outlines plans to spend £4 billion on public sector consultants across Whitehall over the next three years.

<http://ted.europa.eu/udl?uri=TED:NOTICE:86533-2009:TEXT:EN:HTML>

CONSERVATIVE PLANS TO FREEZE COUNCIL TAX

The Scottish Executive in Scotland has frozen council tax for yet another year, working in cooperation with local councils. In its first two full years in office, a Conservative Government will offer a deal to local councils in England:

- If a council can keep its council tax bill rise to 2.5% or below, then central government will provide sufficient additional resources to fund a further 2.5% reduction in the council tax.
- Councils that accept the offer will therefore be able to offer their constituents a complete freeze, or even reduction, in council tax for two years in a row.
- The cost to central government will be funded by reducing Government expenditure on consultants and advertising.

LOCAL FIGURES: CONSERVATIVE COUNCIL TAX FREEZE

Published and promoted by Sir Richard Peek on behalf of the NDCA, The Strand, Barnstaple, N. Devon
EX31 1EU. Tel 01271 343101

The table below shows the rise in council tax under Labour across the country. It also illustrates the value of a two year council tax freeze.

By contrast, council tax in Scotland is £1,149 on Band D in 2009-10, a rise of just 47% (£336) since 1997-98.

<i>Band D Council Tax</i>	<i>1997-98</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>£ rise under Labour</i>	<i>% rise under Labour</i>	<i>Value of a 2 year freeze</i>
England	£688	£1,414	+£726	+105%	£216
South West	£667	£1,462	+£795	+119%	£223
North Devon	£626	£1,513	+£887	+142%	£231

Data sources: DCLG council tax figures. 1997 figures for the new unitary councils are estimated, based on the averages in the predecessor councils.

Assumptions for a two-year freeze: based on current tax levels, and not increasing council tax by 5% a year; value of first year saving added to value of second year saving.

ENDS