

News from Cambridgeshire County Council

Council rejects chance to reduce the damaging effect of government cuts on local services

The background

A. Reduction in central government grant to local councils

Over the last few years, the grant to support councils in meeting the needs of local residents has been cut. In Cambridgeshire it has dropped from £86 million in 2013 to £15 million in 2017 and in 2019 will be NIL.

B Increasing demand for services

65% of the Council's expenditure goes on supporting young children and looking after the frail and elderly. The numbers in both these sectors of the population are rising. In particular, more people are living longer and are in good health but many are not and need the support of the Council's Adult Social Care team. Age UK has highlighted this as a serious national trend. So has Disability UK.

C. Where does the council get its income from?

Cambridgeshire spends £500 million a year on services, (highways, transport, libraries, public health, some schools) in addition to the services in B above.

Half comes from the Council Tax. When the other half is being cut, it is obvious - increase council tax or lose invaluable and essential services.

The Council's dilemma and decision

D. Government restriction on council tax increase

Until fairly recently, local councils could decide their own tax level. Now government 'caps' the increase to 2% for general services and 2% for Adult Social Care.

E. The options for elected councillors

Faced with increasing demand (see B) and rising inflation, councillors have to decide whether to increase taxes or see services cut back. That is where the political parties have different opinions: **UKIP** want no tax rise at all; **Conservatives** are prepared to accept the Adult Social Care increase but nothing more; **Labour** and **Liberal Democrats** give priority to services for the public even though it may mean a small increase in tax; **Independents** are independent!

F. The February 14th decision

In spite of the combined efforts of Labour and Lib Dems to protect services by taking the full 4% permitted, Council voted by 32 to 31 for the 2% Adult Social Care increase only. This saves the average household 44p per week but, sadly, causes real problems for the most vulnerable members of our society.

G. Cambs out of line with the rest of the country - only 10 out of 152 councils have voted to increase their tax by 2% or less. Conservative-controlled councils across the country have taken a very different and less hard-line approach than Cambs Tories.

We are available on the first Saturday of each month from 11.15 - 11.45 a.m. at the Village Hall car park. At other times, please contact us directly:



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Huntingdonshire District Council

The new bin collection rounds started on 27 February 2017. The online bin calendar has now been updated with the new collection arrangements.

Residents can download the next three months collections for their property at www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

A14 Improvements - We have been advised by Jon Lowell from the A14 improvement team as follows: the Grafham Road between Brampton and Brampton Woods will not be closed for any prolonged periods of time. There will be periodic essential closures to carry out certain works, however these will be limited to off peak nights and week-end closures and will be advertised in advance.

HDC council tax will be increased by 2% from April 2017. This adds 5p per week to the charge for a Band D household.

Voluntary sector funding Hunts DC has awarded £534,000 in voluntary sector funding for the next three years, in the form of two contracts.

The contract for the provision of information, advice and guidance has been awarded to Rural Cambs Citizens Advice. The contract will see them continuing to provide high quality professional advice to residents through their online activities, telephone contact, face to face offices, and the availability of home visits.

The second contract for supporting and building capacity in the voluntary and community sector will see a consortium of **Hunts Forum**, as the lead organisation, work with Allia, Cambridgeshire ACRE and Living Sport. This contract will see a range of support being provided to voluntary and community groups looking to develop volunteer opportunities and engage with volunteers, to develop governance arrangements for new or existing community organisations and develop community resilience.



Rod Cantrill for Mayor

The Liberal Democrats have selected Rod Cantrill, a respected and experienced councillor, campaigner and businessman, to be their candidate for Mayor.

Whilst the Devolution Deal is not the one that we all wanted, Rod believes that it provides a platform to exploit the opportunities and address the challenges the region faces.

Rod believes that the new Mayor should not become a 'mini-dictator' favouring his own pet vanity projects. The Mayoral office should seek to deploy power back to local people.

He also believes that the creation of a new 'Combined Authority' should accelerate the idea of abolishing the existing district and county councils and creating one or at most two unitary councils. We cannot afford the luxury of more layers of local government in a time of national austerity.

You will be hearing more from Rod soon. Indeed some of you may receive a letter from him with this Focus. You will have the chance to meet him in the coming weeks. You can also find out about his campaign on-line: www.rod.org.uk

Cambridgeshire: not rejecting Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children

Many people were appalled at Theresa May's recent decision to cut the number of refugee children the UK would accept from 3,000 to 350. She alleged that 'local councils could not afford to look after them'. Cllr Peter Downes enquired if Cambridgeshire had said that and was told NO!. We are currently looking after 61 refugee children and have been planning to accept our full quota of 93. *'These youngsters are the innocent victims of dreadful violence beyond our imaginings. If we are a compassionate and civilised nation, we must play our full part in helping them recover.'*

Thursday, May 4th election date: Apply for your postal vote

Will you be here to vote? If you may be away on business, or on holiday, or if getting to the polling station is physically difficult, you can register to vote by post. Students away at college or working away can also register to vote by post or proxy. **It is very important that we encourage young people to get involved in the democratic process.**

Forms can be obtained from the Electoral Services Officer at Pathfinder House, St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN. You can make contact by phone on 388388 or via the web-site: www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/More/Councils and Democracy/Elections/How to vote/postal vote.

