

News from Cambridgeshire County Council

Council rejects the 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 - many 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.

Cambridgeshire's dilemma and its 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; 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.



If you would like to follow up any topics raised in this edition of FOCUS, please contact your nearest Lib Dem County Councillor, Peter Downes in Brampton:

peter.downes@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Tel: 07765 833 486

www.huntingdonlibdems.org.uk

Book the date - Thursday May 4th

Two elections on the same day:

Cambridgeshire County Council and the **Mayor** for the new Combined Authority of Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.

Will you be able to vote? See box at the bottom of side 2 for details of how to make sure that you can exercise your democratic right to vote.

Feedback from 'Life in Buckden' survey

Peter Downes reports: In February I carried out a 25% sample survey of Buckden residents to help me get a better understanding of your key issues. This got a very good response and I am grateful to all those who took the time and trouble to reply.

Main findings:

a. **The overall impression is that Buckden is a good place to live, with good facilities and a positive community atmosphere because of the range of activities and amenities available.** You have two market towns not far away but they are not always easy to access because of public transport cuts and road congestion. There is some concern about the closure of shops in Huntingdon Town Centre (which may improve when the re-build is complete).

b. Main worry is traffic and particularly access via the roundabout at peak times and *'you must keep on about this until something is done'*.

c. There are some pinchpoints in the village where more parking restrictions might be helpful.

d. Mixed views on housing - a shortage of affordable housing but also a strong feeling that the village should not be over-developed.

e. Appreciative remarks about the quality of medical services and educational opportunities.

f. Some specific suggestions which fall within the remit of the parish council and which I will pass on to them.

If you were in the 25% sample and have not yet replied, it is not too late to do so. Your ideas would be valued. If you were not in the sample and would like a survey to complete, please write to me at peter.downes@cambridgeshire.gov.uk and I will get one to you. A Freepost envelope for your reply is included!



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 is the election date this year

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.](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/More/Councils%20and%20Democracy/Elections/How%20to%20vote/postal%20vote)