

County Councillor Simon Bywater - Report for Annual Parish Meetings

On Tuesday, 18 February 2014 a full meeting of Cambridgeshire County Council agreed the draft budget proposals which effectively mean widespread cuts for us all. Councillors agreed budget proposals which show public services are in for tough times ahead to meet nearly £149 million in savings over the next five years. The proposals had been put forward to meet the huge savings required for 2014/15 and the following years. It agreed, like many other authorities across the country, to increase Council Tax by 1.99 per cent to help protect frontline services.

I didn't agree with this tax rise and voted against it, as I know many households in the ward struggle to pay their bills.

There are no easy solutions to meet the savings and some services will need to be cut or reduced as the Council has already saved £128 million in the last three years.

Cambridgeshire is one of the hardest hit authorities in the country and has had a reduction in the Government's Settlement Funding Assessment of 20.9 per cent (£29.9m) over the next two financial years. The County is also the lowest funded for education in the UK and has the fastest growing population. (Cambridgeshire Councillors from all political parties are trying to influence Central Government to change this) but I suspect we won't see much or any change until the General election of 2015.

This means the Council is seeing more and more demands on its services - especially for those who are the most vulnerable - as more people need them or are living longer and require more expensive care services. Increased population puts a £9 million strain on the Council's budget every year while inflation also annually adds extra pressure on decreasing funds. Hence why all our voluntary organisations are so important for us all in the years ahead.

Cambridgeshire County Council is expected to make savings over the next year (2014/2015) of around £38 million. This is following savings of £42 million last year (2012/2013), and a further £32 million this current financial year (2013/2014).

The Council has continued to look to drive out efficiencies; however, the financial challenges are such that reductions in services and support are unavoidable.

I am working closely with various departments at the County Council as I believe that preventative services should not be jeopardised. Jo Voce and her excellent locality team for the area are doing a fantastic job. This closely links with the work I'm doing with Sawtry Community College in order to be better prepared for the challenges that potentially lay ahead.

I would also encourage people to volunteer and use local facilities/businesses as often as possible. The inevitable cuts mean we will all need to do our bit, when and where we can. Sitting back and waiting for someone to do something isn't always going to be the answer now.

Pot holes and the conditions of our roads are a constant source of complaint as demand outstrips the budget/ resources. I would urge residents to report any damage to our roads on the county Council website so we can make highways aware of the issues in order to help priorities the repairs.

The County Council Cabinet structure is changing to a full committee system in May 2014. It is hoped there will be much better democratic decision making. At the time of writing this report I currently sit as a member of the Children's and Young People Overview and scrutiny committee, I'm a member of the fire Authority and regularly sit on the Schools transport appeals committee.

Now for some good news;-

The Chancellor announced in the Budget statement on 19 March 2014 that a City Deal has been agreed for Greater Cambridge (defined as the combined area of Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire). This will see Government allocate up to £500m to Greater Cambridge –£100m in the period 2015-19 and up to a further £400m following depending on the achievement of certain triggers, for investment in transport infrastructure. Although this isn't linked direct to our ward it can be seen as a good thing. The ripple effect this additional funding will bring can only be good for the wider remit of Cambridgeshire

It's also worthy to note that the biggest annual sporting event in the world is set to come to Cambridgeshire on Monday 7 July, the first road closure information for the Tour de France has been released. With such a large scale event residents, businesses and visitors are being given advance notification to help prepare for, plan and enjoy a unique day in Cambridge's history. In the build-up to the arrival of the Tour, detailed information will be given to residents, businesses and visitors regarding the impact of the race on Cambridge and the county. This will be made available online at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/letourstage3 and www.cambridge.gov.uk/le-tour-cambridge, as well as through leaflets, roadshows and events.

Rest assured I will continue to represent the interests of the villages and surrounding villages of the ward to the best of my ability.

I try to regularly attend parish meetings to find out what is happening in the ward and I'm keeping a close eye on the impact of Bus services which are currently being reviewed under CFT (Cambridgeshire future transport). The next working group for this is being held on the 1st of July 2014 and I would encourage people to attend.

I don't profess to know all the answers to the questions I receive but I will always try to find out.

In the meantime please don't hesitate to contact me and thank you for your continued support.

Cllr Simon Bywater
County Councillor for Sawtry & Ellington Ward

