

County Councillors Report to Brettenham Parish Council, 9th February 2017

There has been little news from the County Council over the Christmas period, and in any event things are quiet as we move towards the moratorium period which starts on 23rd March, six weeks before the election of a new Council on 4th May.

Devolution

Following the failure to broker a deal with Norfolk Councils towards the end of last year Devolution appears to be off the agenda for the time being. Attention is now turning towards the old idea of a unitary council for Suffolk which would save money. In my view this would be a good idea but it is unclear at present how this would be taken forward.

The Budget

The Budget was passed today at Full Council.

The gross budget has fallen from £1,104m to £934m, a reduction of £170m. This is largely due to the conversion of maintained schools to academies and the impact of the reduction in government grant that has been ongoing since 2011/12.

For 2017/18 There is a forecast budget gap of some £40m and savings of around £31 m have been identified. In accordance with the pledge made by the administration of the council ahead of the last election, core council tax will not increase for 2017/18. However, recently, the Government has announced that it is to allow Councils to raise a specific levy in 2017/18 of 3% to help to fund social care. This is 1% more than previously announced. If we decide to apply this additional 1% it will reduce the deficit by a further £2m. but the shortfall could still amount to as much as £8.

It has not been possible ahead of the elections in May to identify further places to save money and as a result it is likely that any shortfall will be made up by transferring money from the contingency reserve.

The savings that are currently anticipated for 2017/18 can be found in the recently published County Council papers. These mainly represent a continuation of the transformation programmes that have been in place for 2 years now and other smaller reductions elsewhere. The problem of course with taking money from reserves is that the money can only be spent once and prudence dictates that the reserves be rebuilt. I think it is therefore very likely that further cuts in services will be announced after May's election and that core council tax will be increased this time next year.

Brettenham

Since your last meeting I have been in correspondence with some residents with regards to inappropriate diversions in the vicinity of the village. Two specific diversions have been brought to my attention since we last met and I have raised both of these with the relevant officers. I cannot say that the replies that I received have been particularly helpful or constructive and I think that this is a matter that could be usefully taken up after the election by your new County Councillor. One problem it seems is that there are rules with regard to the kinds of roads that can be used to create a diversion and this sometimes leads to the most obvious route being ignored.

I have also had continuing correspondence with regard to Broadband about which I updated you at your last meeting.

I understand that there has been a meeting about this in the village and that The Chairman has the facts to hand.

If a sample of telephone numbers from different parts of the village is sent to Jonathan Chown he will be able to give further advice about the timing of delivery of High Speed Broadband.

Jenny Antill

February 2017