

District Councillor's report, September 2010

1. Emergency budget and specific government grant announcements

The government's emergency budget announced at the end of June contained some announcements that will impact on the resources of the District Council:

- there will be a Council Tax freeze in 2011/12 and potentially also 2012/13. Those Councils able to demonstrate they are managing their costs may be eligible for a grant to freeze Council Tax, but details are not yet available.
- There will be a public sector pay freeze for two years from 2011/12, except for those earning less than £21,000, who will receive a flat £250 increase
- There will be average real term reductions for government departments of 25% over 4 years.

In addition, Housing Planning Delivery Grant has been cancelled, for which we had budgeted income of £200,000. In order to make up for the shortfall we will need to withdraw some of the £0.5m put into reserve in 2009/10.

2. Comprehensive Area Assessment abolished

The CAA process has been abolished by the new Government, in an effort to reduce the burden of inspection on local government. While this is to be welcomed in terms of the officer time it will save us, incidentally it looked highly likely that our score under the CAA process would have risen from 2 to 3.

3. Funding for culture and community

The John Peel Centre for Creative Arts, Stowmarket has applied for funding from the People's Millions. The Lukeswood project in Elmswell has already been successful in obtaining funding (of nearly £50,000), being the bulk of the almost £70,000 raised in the District from this source. In addition, the Community Development Officer is working with the residents of Battsford to launch the local pub, the Punch Bowl, as the county's first Community Pub.

4. Pest control

The Suffolk County Council pest control contract has been put out to tender, and once a preferred bidder has been selected the service is likely to be transferred to them.

5. Enforcement

Dumping of green waste is causing a problem, and several individuals have already been warned. Action in the form of warnings, issue of Fixed Penalty Notices and prosecutions, has already been taken against over 80 people for fly tipping this year. David Abbott, enforcement officer, is also getting tough on signs which appear on the side of roads advertising events or activities, without authorisation/permission. Where Parish Councils are responsible for these, they are asked to remove them once the events have taken place.

6. Street cleaning

Following the very successful Spring Clean in the District, several individuals have volunteered as litter pickers, and have been provided with kits by the District Council.

7. Mortgage rescue scheme

The Mortgage Rescue Scheme was introduced by the Government in 2008 to reduce the number of people losing their homes. Those eligible for assistance can sell their home to a housing association but continue to live in the property, paying a subsidised rent. The scheme targets vulnerable groups, such as families with dependent children, the elderly or others considered vulnerable. They will

usually be several months in arrears with their mortgage and be threatened with re-possession by their lender.

In 2009 the scheme was extended to help people in negative equity, with those with debts amounting to more than 20% of the value of their home able to apply.

The District Council is working closely with Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau to help those eligible.

8. Suffolk streets ahead

Last year we were successful in getting Government funding to run a pilot project to encourage one street in each District to reduce their waste by half in one collection fortnight.

The results of an information campaign (which last year was called 'Seven Suffolk Streets') gave us a waste reduction result of 39% across the households that were involved. Given the importance of reducing the burden on landfills (and the associated rising cost), it has been agreed with our District partners to roll out the project on a larger scale (15 times larger on average) than the first project). The project is called "Suffolk Streets Ahead".

Various bin collection rounds have been put forward by our District colleagues where we believe we can make gains to reduce business, school and household waste and increase recycling rates.

The chosen areas across Suffolk are areas around:

- Mildenhall
- Haverhill
- Elmswell
- East Bergholt
- Sidegate Lane area, Ipswich
- Kesgrave
- South Lowestoft

The main thrust of the project relies upon face to face contact with the community to ensure people understand what they can actively do to reduce the amount of waste they produce. Consequently we are proposing to use teams of 'doorknockers ' throughout September and October to actively engage with the public, schools and businesses in the chosen collection area providing them with information to help to reduce their waste.