

Richard Stevens (Liberal Democrat Councillor-Old Hastings). February 2011 Report

Dear All,

I reported to you previously upon the dire budgetary circumstances currently being faced by Borough and District Councils such as our own.

No one denies that the country faces a massive deficit and there really seems little point in playing the blame game when our core services are under such pressure.

All we can say is that it was disastrous to leave the financial institutions to their own devices.

What is questionable, however, is whether it is reasonable for local government to take the biggest hit of all when it comes to public expenditure reduction. The 28% reduction in Local Government funding overall is by far the largest reduction being faced by any arm of central government. With so much talk about the need for Localism, it is hard to see how this squares with such an attack on our level of service provision.

Hastings Council is particularly badly hit because it has been given additional monies in the past (i.e.£12.7million of Area Based Grants over the last 3 years).Hastings now finds itself losing all this extra help on top of reductions in base grant funding from the government and monies given specifically to help tackle homelessness and to administer Housing Benefit. Council Tax is also frozen. For 2 years the government will provide a Transitional Grant but even taking this into account, it means a 30.7% reduction and by 2013/14 we will have reached a cash funding cut of some 47.4%

Reductions of this magnitude will mean job losses (some 40 jobs will go),reductions in the scale of services provided, more partnership working and increases to various fees and charges. Some say that this is the most challenging budget ever faced by Hastings and it is hard to disagree with that.

Every Council Service Directorate has been told to make savings and I will highlight just some of these to give you a flavour of what is being suggested:

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH:Amenities,Waste and Leisure: Merge the Waste and Street warden roles. Delete the Post of Waste and Recycling Manager.

Close the Silverhill Toilets. Allotment Assocs. to take on more maintenance and clearing work. Reduce budgets for Bus Shelters, seating and streetsigns.Close the Museum and Art Gallery one day a week. Introduce Pay-Parking for the Hastings Country Park. Total savings this year are estimated to be £147,000. I stress that I have listed just some of the proposed cuts.

REGENERATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES: Many posts to go including 2 from the Neighbourhood Regeneration Team. Community Safety more or less transfers to the County wide Safety Partnership and we lose control of our Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS: Almost all the budget heads are reduced by 10% and this includes a reduction for all the key events in the town's calendar such as Jack in the Green, Carnival, Hastings Week etc. It is proposed to delete the Mayor's P.A. and Chauffeurs posts and to reduce the number of Editions of the "ABOUT" magazine. Even the budget for carrying out Citizens Panel consultation exercises is up for reduction.

Much, if not quite all, Council services will be administered either from the Town Hall or from Aquila House. Renaissance House will become a one-stop-shop for the voluntary sector.

These are indeed challenging times but as local representatives we have a duty to highlight the plight of our most vulnerable.

ISSUES WITH WHICH I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE OLD HASTINGS WARD:

I remain Chairman of the Stade Management Group and at our most recent meeting we welcomed the news that some money will be available for a spring-clean of the Stade under the good offices of the Stade Wardens-thank you Yasmin for all your work on this.

We are also making progress with our aim to provide a licensing structure for the

occupation of the Net Huts. We continue with our support of the fishermen, recognising their rights and balancing the demands of a working beach with the interests of all those who also work within or visit the Stade area.

I contribute to life in the Old Town via the Carnival Committee, by working closely with the Residents Association, through the Stade Partnership, The Winkle Club and weekly gatherings with Fishermen's representatives ! Over the years I have developed a network of contacts across the Old Town. The Council-related casework continues its steady flow and covers the whole gambit of Council Services.

In Clive Vale I also find my fair share of issues arising which recently have included petitions in respect of the plans to bring "Pay and Display" to the Country Park and demands to change the parking arrangements in Mount Road to assist small businesses (hopefully the latter has been successfully concluded).I have also been one of those involved in residents concerns with speeding vehicles in Rocklands Lane, with Planning concerns in Barley and Belmont Roads and with the long running problems experienced by both vehicles and pedestrians at the " Sussex Arms" junction. I was recently very flattered to be the speaker for the evening at the Clive Vale Residents Association A.G.M. At this point I would like to point out that quite frequently I find myself working with Cllr.Hodges who is the other Old Hastings Councillor (H.B.C.). In my view it would be totally counter-productive not to do so. We are after all both trying to do the best we can for our electorate.

Turning back to the Old Town, it has been really pleasing to be able to welcome significant European Fisheries Funding to help develop and diversify our precious Old Town fishing community and their much threatened industry. The "buzz-word" is SUSTAINABILITY and the funding will be spread over 3 years.

As "Destination Stade" continues at a pace, I have with others been closely involved with all the ramifications of the dramatic changes and improvements. With my links to so many Old Town Clubs,Associations,Charities,Events Organisers and of course the Council itself, I hope that I am in a position to lobby where necessary from a broadly based and informed standpoint.

Other matters with which I have been involved WITH OTHERS of late include:

Demanding a proper action plan to provide safe parking in Croft Road and improved lighting.

Ensuring that key areas are properly gritted during severe weather.

Arguing for more suitable pick-up and dropping off points for the Language Students.

Raising funds for a new winkle-based sculpture on Winkle Island.

Participating in some interesting debates about the Rock-a-Nore junction and Traffic Signals !

Requesting the removal of unsuitable and redundant lamp-columns on Winkle Island.

Parking arrangements for Pleasant Row Residents.

Supporting H.O.T.R.A. in their demand for paving on the Western side of the High Street entrance and the removal of the dangerous high pavement outside the Old Town Museum.

Continue to press for the full pedestrianisation of Courthouse Street-a campaign first begun with a petition presented to me by a supporter !

Support the Isobel Blackman Centre and demand proper service provision .

In closing because I am sure that this report is long enough for anybody, can I just mention that I still believe that entrance to the Jerwood Gallery should be free, that usage of Foreshore Trust monies should be in the gift of a Community Advisory Committee and that the new Stade Open Space should be seen as an opportunity to expand upon our town's traditional events by responding to the ideas suggested from the immediate community.

Please contact me if the above has raised any questions or comments,

Best Regards,

Richard Stevens (Liberal Democrat Councillor-Old Hastings).