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## NEWS

# 'Council should be ashamed over tax'

Scrutiny intensified this week over a council's decision to cut Council Tax for the majority while making poorer people pay more.

One member of Uttlesford District Council said councillors "should be ashamed" of the move but her demand for a re-think was rejected.

Uttlesford Tories rubber-stamped the authority's budget for 2014/15, which included a Council Tax cut of two per cent, after an impassioned plea from Cllr Christina Cant failed to gain support.

She and three fellow Liberal Democrat colleagues voted against the proposal on the grounds that they disagreed with an earlier decision to change the Council Tax benefits system.

From April, vulnerable families will have to find an extra £46 for the year after the minimum amount of Council Tax they have to pay was upped from 8.5 per cent to 12.5 per cent.

Disabled people and pensioners are protected under the changes and will not be affected.

Cutting Council Tax by two per cent is costing Uttlesford £96,000 for the year – £34,000 more than the amount it is saving by making 1,321 vulnerable households pay more.

Speaking at last Thursday's full council meeting, Cllr Cant said: "I cannot support this budget because it is deeply inequitous.

"We are taking £62,000 away from the most vulnerable people and I feel that is wrong.

"I understand why it's been done because it's a great thing to do politically and will look good in pamphlets. Those people will probably come out and vote.

"The people we are taking £62,000 from probably won't."

## Saffron Walden Reporter

A sandwich. A book second-class of stamps. Maybe even a pint of beer at a stretch.

Just a few of the things the average person could buy with the £3 Uttlesford District Council is putting into their top pocket by cutting Council Tax by two per cent.

As one councillor said, "it looks good in pamphlets", but in reality is little more than a token gesture. Political point-scoring for those chasing votes in next year's elections.

But while the majority of voters are looked after, 1,321 vulnerable families will have difficulty putting food on the table.

Those struggling to make ends meet will be £46 worse off this year because of changes to Council Tax benefit.

Forty six pounds that could be spent on school uniform for their children.

It is a move that will save the

Defending the move, Conservative leader Jim Ketteridge said the council was responding to Government policy to progressively cut funding for the Local Council Tax Support system.

He said: "This council has the most generous Council Tax support system in the county and further afield.

"Some of our near neighbours have increased it to 25 or 30 per cent, so 12.5 per cent is by far the most generous.

"We have not included people with disabilities either, which most other councils have, and are increasing the amount in small increments.

"There are lots of people on the cusp of falling into difficulties who will be helped by having more money to spend because of the two per cent Council Tax cut."

Council Tax benefit went from zero, or full benefit, to 8.5 per cent last April and will now rise to 12.5 per cent from next month. Doing nothing was not an option, according to the council, and if no changes

were made it would likely lead to cuts in services.

"I'm not saying we should go back to zero," Cllr Cant said, "but I think we could go back to eight per cent.

"It's going to be a grim year for people on benefits and it's not going to get better any time soon."

Cllr Cant suggested using money from the New Homes Bonus, awarded to the council by the Government based on the number of houses built each year, and freezing Council Tax instead of cutting it.

However, members noted that it was too late to alter the Local Council Tax Support System as it had already been ratified at a previous meeting. They voted to approve the budget by 28-4.

council £62,000 so that it can afford the £96,000 it is costing to cut tax for everyone else.

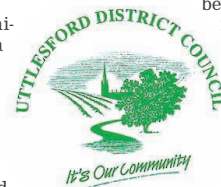
Not to mention the expenses increase Uttlesford's cabinet agreed for themselves earlier this year.

At a full council meeting to approve the forthcoming year's budget, Cllr Christina Cant summed it up best when she said councillors should be ashamed.

Yes, the Government is progressively cutting funding for Council Tax benefits but councils do have a choice about how they deal with it.

Especially those that can afford a two per cent Council Tax cut and have £7million of savings sitting in the bank.

It appears to be a contradiction in policy that the council is cutting benefits on the one hand, while also playing an integral part in the opening of Uttlesford's first foodbank.



Deaths

### JEAN MARY COX

Née Moule of Steeple Bumpstead died peacefully at the West Suffolk Hospital on Sunday 23rd February 2014, aged 81 years.

Dearly loved wife of the late Percy, much loved mum of John & Glynis, Ann & Eric and Graham & Beverley, devoted nanny of Claire & Scott, Cheryl, Richard and Sara, Daniel & Kate, Michelle & Steve, Jonathan & Tracy, Christopher & Michelle, and dearest great-nanny to Alyssa, Shannon, Jack, Ethan, Abbie, Megan, Isabelle, Lacy, Alfie and Zachary.

Funeral service at Steeple Bumpstead Parish Church on Tuesday 11th March at 1pm, to be followed by cremation at the West Suffolk Crematorium at 4.30pm.

Family flowers only please but if wished donations may be made payable to St Nicholas Hospice (to benefit the day centre) and may be sent c/o H. J. Paintin Ltd., 60 Withersfield Road, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 9HE.

### HUBERT GRIGG (DON)

Passed away at Addenbrookes Hospital on Monday 3rd March 2014, aged 84 years.

A dearly loved husband to Nancy, he will be sadly missed by all his family and friends.

Funeral Service at St Mary's Parish Church, Saffron Walden on Tuesday 11th March at 11am.

No flowers please, but donations if desired, may be made payable to 'ACT' Ward C2 and sent c/o Peasgood and Skeates, Shire Hill, Saffron Walden, CB11 3AQ.

Acknowledgments

### BRENDA PEASGOOD

David and Julie wish to thank all who sent cards, letters and messages of condolence to them at this sad time.

Thank you to all who attended Brenda's Thanksgiving Service and for the donations sent in her memory.

Grateful thanks are also extended to Rev David Tomlinson, the carers at WeCare and Highfields, the local district nurses, Doctors at Gold Street Surgery and to all their friends at Peasgood & Skeates for their kindness and support.

Please accept this as their only, but most sincere, acknowledgement.

### ANTHONY JOHN MENELL

Jan and family wish to express their gratitude to all who attended and assisted at Anthony's funeral and for the many beautiful flowers and written condolences received in his memory.

The care and conduct of the service by Maggie Platts - Humanist Celebrant, Phil Warner and David Peasgood and staff, made the day particularly memorable.

### PHYLLIS WILLIAMSON

The family would like to thank everyone who came to the church and who sent cards, and thank you to her friends from Hatherley Court who sent donations to the British Heart Foundation.

Musicians hit right note - Pages 16/17