

## **District Councillor Tom Bygott**

### **Council Funding Settlement**

Just before Christmas, the Government announced its funding settlement for local government. South Cambridgeshire District Council's grant settlement from central government for 2014/15 will be cut by 24% – a reduction of around £870,000. The County's funding was similarly cut, by about 21%. Part of their rationale is that local government should be more accountable to local residents, answerable locally for its taxing and spending decisions, and not dependant on central government (and therefore serving central government rather than the people) in order to secure its livelihood. This is a reasonable argument and fits with the Localism agenda.

### **Fall in the Cost of Managing Homelessness**

Along with a range of initiatives to keep people in their homes, South Cambridgeshire District Council has purchased ten formerly empty homes in the district to increase the amount of temporary accommodation available. The housing strategy agreed earlier this year aimed to half last year's £8,000 monthly bill for housing people in B&Bs on a temporary basis while permanent accommodation could be found – but efforts this year have seen the bill fall by 70% to an average of just under £2,400. This shows how planning ahead can be a more effective substitute for high spending.

### **Grants to Reduce Energy Consumption**

Another strategy for effective budget management is to prioritise long-term investment. The high cost of energy has been one of the major reasons why this recession has been so difficult for people. Almost £100,000 has been secured to invest in some of the latest renewable energy generating technology in Council-owned properties. The grant awarded to South Cambridgeshire District Council by the Energy Saving Trust will mean 18 air source heat pumps and the same number of solar thermal devices to heat water will be installed before the end of June 2014.

The Council is already reinvesting rent collected from tenants to keep homes warmer and external cladding has been added to over 120 properties that have solid walls, mostly in areas that have no access to mains gas.

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