

## Budget Consultation.

This month Kent County Council launches its annual budget consultation with the endeavour to continue to protect the complex services it provides, particularly those that support the most vulnerable in our communities, both young and old, whilst continuing to support economic growth to make Kent a great place to live, work and enjoy.

The Autumn Budget Statement will be discussed at the county council meeting [on 18<sup>th</sup> October](#) and sets out the challenges the council faces and the need to find further savings of £57million next year out of a net annual revenue budget of £958million. The proposals, which involve a six-week long consultation, suggest an increase of just under 3% in council tax and a further 2% social care precept to help meet the challenge ahead for the coming financial year.

KCC Leader Paul Carter said: "In recent years, with intelligent planning and a great deal of hard work from our staff, we have delivered extraordinary savings to protect and enhance the complex array of services that this authority provides. We have identified a potential £41million of savings so far, but still need to find a further £16million if we are to continue to support good local services for the next financial year and beyond.

However, as part of the government's austerity package, funding for local authorities continues to shrink, demand continues to rise and the scope to make further savings from efficiencies is now very limited. We are waiting for the Chancellor's Autumn Budget to hear more about the final local government settlement in the hope that additional money may be found for next year, but as a responsible local authority we are having to plan for no change. It's encouraging that, post Brexit, the Prime Minister has intimated there will be an end to austerity.

We are listening hard to the voice of Kent residents and there seems to be a real understanding that the public services we all value do need to be protected and that means they must be paid for. The consultation is the chance to tell us if we have got that judgement right."

Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said: "The council provides a huge range of essential services to the people of Kent. Some of these services, like repairing potholes and running libraries, are visible to just about everyone. Others, like children's services and adult social care, relate to specific groups but form the basis of a decent society and now account for the majority of KCC's budget.

"We help and support vulnerable people of all ages and the decisions we take will have great impact on many people's lives. The authority believes that those services to the young, the elderly, the vulnerable and those with disabilities, are a true test of a successful Kent community and that residents have a firm understanding that they must be properly funded." He said it had been widely reported that several other county councils had found themselves in deep financial crises and had been forced to cut essential services, but Kent had so far avoided that.

“In the past few years we have had to take many common-sense decisions, transform the way we work and manage every service we deliver wisely. In some areas identified by residents as the most important to them, we have even managed to increase investment and spending. There is, however, no doubt that we face some tough decisions. Councils have been given a flat settlement until at least 2020 which includes extra money from modest annual council tax increases. That means the cash we have to spend on services has not kept pace with costs and demands for those services which have been rising for a number of years.

“We have some big decisions to make and we would very much value resident's views and suggestions before we make them.”

**KCC is inviting views on three key areas.**

- **Council Tax – is a rise acceptable if it helps to sustain the services you most value?**
- **The future of our services – are we focussing on the right priorities or have we got some things wrong?**
- **How can we improve our communication with you – so that you are aware of the challenges we face now and in the future?**

The council estimates that increased demands and costs will amount to about £66million, which together with net grant reductions of £28million result in the need to raise and/or save £94million. Increasing council tax by just under 3% plus the 2% social care levy would raise £37million, and the remainder must be found from making savings and already planned but limited use of reserves. At this stage the council is still to identify detailed plans for around £16million pending the Chancellor's budget and local government settlement. Taken together, the proposed changes would add just over £1 per week to the KCC element of the council tax bill for a typical Band C property.

KCC has already saved around £640million over the last eight years. In doing so it has sought to protect 'front line' services but that means reductions have fallen more heavily on other areas. It has achieved about a third of its savings by providing the same service for less money and another third by doing things differently.

Details of the consultation and on how to take part can be found at: [www.kent.gov.uk/budget](http://www.kent.gov.uk/budget). Residents who do not have personal access to a computer can visit their local library and complete the questionnaire online there either through one of our free public access computers or, if they have their own device, by using the free public Wi-Fi.

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