

COUNTY COUNCIL - GARTREE NEWS STRETTON ROAD CLOSURE

Contractors required Stretton Road to be closed from mid January for 4 weeks so they could safely carry out new drainage works for the Miller Homes development. A number of people contacted me to make me aware that there was considerable inconvenience caused to residents and misinformation about just which part of the road was going to be closed. I followed every enquiry up with Highways.

The road should be open again by the time you read this. One of the principal objections was that the whole width of the road had to be closed off, but Highways engineers assured me that with the size of the drainage pipes and the depth they had to be buried, there was a risk of the trench caving in if traffic was permitted to pass by. Diversion signs were well situated although the route was several miles long, but on this occasion, Road Closed actually meant just that.

COUNTY COUNCIL FINANCES

Last month I gave some indications of the level of savings that the County Council needs to find over the next few years. There are more details being made available now, as the County Council is meeting soon to agree the final budget.

The council is proposing, over the next four years, to save £82 million, lose 1,000 posts and change the way many services are delivered.

The public consultation resulted in thousands of responses which highlighted priorities to protect safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children, to support winter maintenance and to freeze Council Tax next year.

In order to meet the £82 million savings, the Council is proposing to make £58 million of efficiency savings, by cutting back-office costs and changing the way some services are delivered. Despite this, it will still have to make some savings from services, of around £24 million.

The council is also proposing to accept Government support to enable it to freeze

Council Tax next year, and it proposes to freeze it again over the next few years.

Nick Rushton, the council's deputy leader, said: "We know that the country can't support the current level of public spending and councils have to save money. We've had an extremely tough funding settlement but, by being responsible and planning for savings, we are proposing to limit the impact on the public.

"Our priority is to provide value for money and run the council as efficiently as possible. Some cuts to services are inevitable but we've listened to the 5,000 people who took part in our budget consultation and we're going to do our best to protect priorities such as vulnerable adult and children's social care and winter maintenance."

The council has already saved £1 million by reducing the number of departments and senior managers. Examples of additional proposed efficiency savings include:

- Saving £1 million per year, by sharing back office functions with Nottingham City Council;
- Cutting management posts and administration, saving £7 million;
- Saving £22 million from commissioning and procurement – more effective buying of goods and services.

Examples of proposed savings from services include:

- Cutting street lighting energy bills;
- Staff overtime and reclaimable mileage reductions;
- A review of libraries, heritage and arts services.

However, there is some good news as well. Some services will see more spent on them, due to rising demand. These include:

- Meeting increasing adult social care needs, due to an ageing population;
- Supporting children in care;
- Meeting the Landfill Tax bill and using alternative, more sustainable, methods of waste disposal.

The council is predicting 1,000 full-time equivalent posts will be lost over four years but hopes to minimise compulsory redundancies, through staff turnover, natural wastage and control of vacant posts.

Leicestershire's Cabinet discussed the draft budget on 19th January. The report was then debated in detail by the council's scrutiny committees, before Cabinet met in mid February to agree their recommendations to the 23rd February full council meeting which made the final decisions.

Kevin Feltham

kevin.feltham@leics.gov.uk or 2793232