

Chelmondiston Parish Council

www.chelmondiston.suffolk.gov.uk

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12th January 2015

Re: Local Government Finance Settlement 2015-16 ... Consultation

With regard to **Automatic Precept Referendums**

An extract from an oral statement made by the Local Government Minister Kris Hopkins to the House of Commons, when announcing the provisional local government finance settlement for 2015-16.

"Parishes are an important part of local government, delivering valuable and valued local services. However that is not a reason for them to impose inflation-busting increases on their taxpayers. The average Band D council tax in England has risen by 2% since 2011 to 2012 – the equivalent figure for the parish element is 14.7% over the same period".

In a previous consultation the Parish Council noted its concerns on automatic precept referendums and these views have not changed.

This Parish Council considers that different rules should apply to local councils and to principle local authorities.

Parish councils need flexibility to vary their precept request, depending on their parishioners' needs and on the services that they now provide, and may be asked to provide in the future; especially as services are being cutback further or removed by the Local and County Authorities.

Without a doubt, automatic referendums will limit councils' commitment to community projects and would reduce their activity.

This Parish Council, along with most other councils, discusses and sets its budget and spending programme at public meetings and all information is available to view.

Any new major projects would be debated with our parishioners at a Parish Meeting, prior to setting the budget. This is a democratic simple and workable system and the costs are minimal.

What level of expenditure does the Government consider excessive?

When setting a *de minimis percentage* the Government should bear in mind that a percentage threshold for one parish council could be catastrophic, for another quite acceptable.

The Government should also take into account all the extra expenditure that will be incurred if a referendum is called for. There is a very strong possibility that this cost would wipe out the actual proposed rise of the council tax!

Local councils are not informed of their taxbase, which they use to determine how much the council tax will be, until a few weeks prior to the deadline for submitting their precept order. An automatic referendum at such a late stage would put a tremendous unnecessary pressure on parish councils and the community.

Does Government have any idea how diverse parish councils and their communities are?
How many MPs visit their parishes or show any interest in their parish councils?

Yours sincerely

Fran Sewell

Chelmondiston Parish Clerk

Please address all correspondence to the Parish Clerk

e-mailed: 12/01/2015