

**Council Tax 2013/14**

We announced last month that the County Council element of the council tax will be frozen for the third consecutive year. This means that for the four years of the current administration at Endeavour House the council tax will only have risen by 2.4%.

**The future of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service**

Suffolk residents are currently being asked their views about the county's Fire and Rescue Service working more closely with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough service. This could potentially mean a full merger. This follows the successful merger of the fire control centres for the two authorities last year. A business case is currently being prepared which it is hoped will show that fewer back office and top management staff will be required thus saving costs while maintaining or improving the service.

**Future Back Office Requirements**

At last month's Cabinet meeting it was agreed that the partnership between BT, the County and Mid-Suffolk D.C. to run back office services like finance, ICT and H.R. should not be extended or renegotiated after it ends in 2014. This means the end of C.S.D. as we know it today. Many will say thank goodness! We are, therefore, now looking for other outside organisations to perform these functions at a lower cost as the B.T. contract has escalated significantly more than originally anticipated.

**Records and Heritage functions**

It has become clear that it is necessary for the County to reorganise and re-site its records and heritage functions and we are currently investigating the options that we have. They include moving within Ipswich or to Stowmarket

**Future of County Care Homes**

The Scrutiny Committee has confirmed the Cabinet's decision to appoint Care UK as the new provider of the council's residential care homes and community wellbeing centres for older people (known as day centres). The running of the 16 homes will be taken over by Care UK who will then inject £60m to build 10 new homes, some on existing sites. Without exception the 16 homes need substantial investment which the council can not afford in these difficult times and hence the need to transfer their operation to an outside provider. When the rebuilding programme is complete there will be around and extra 150 places with most of the new beds suitable for dementia patients.

**Future Expenditure Savings**

I have mentioned previously that in each of the next two years the Council is budgeting to save a further £26m. on top of the £65m. savings made last year, but this is unlikely to be the end. Before the start of the financial year 2014/15 the government is going to indicate the likely reduction in the central grant to local authorities over the following four years and the best guess that we can make is that we will be looking to find another £60m. over that period.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.