

SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL

A Public Meeting was held in Swanton Morley Village Hall on Friday 14th January 2011 to discuss Norfolk County Council cuts under their 'Big Conversation' consultation. The meeting commenced at 7pm.

Chairman: Mr Alan Fairchild MBE

Panel: Mr George Freeman MP
Mr Bill Borrett – Norfolk County Council Cabinet Member for Efficiency
Mr Adrian Stasiak – Deputy Leader of Breckland District Council
Mr Roger Atterwill – Chairman of Swanton Morley Parish Council

55 members of the public were in attendance

Mr Fairchild opened the meeting, welcoming everyone, introducing the panellists and reporting apologies for absence. 23 questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting (appendix a) and there would also be the opportunity to ask questions from the floor.

Mr Borrett gave a short introduction into the reason for the Big Conversation. Norfolk County Council only has ¾ of the money it has been accustomed to to deliver front line services, and the purpose of the Big Conversation is to ask the people of the Norfolk what they want from Norfolk County Council. He introduced Anne Tansley Thomas, who will be recording all comments and taking these back to Norfolk County Council, and Chris Alston, who would assist with any Highways related questions.

Question 1 from Mr T Poulter (Brettenham and Kilverston Parish Council) (Q1 Appendix A)
Certain aspects of proposed cuts will have unintended but predictable consequences. Does the panel agree that the cessation of refunds for asbestos disposal at waste disposal sites and the reduction of hours that recycling centres are open will increase fly tipping in our county?

Mr Borrett questioned whether Norfolk County Council should be subsidising asbestos disposal. He admitted that that this will have an effect on fly tipping and added that there had to be ways found to mitigate this.

Mr Stasiak advised that when the hours for the Snetterton recycling centre were reduced there was an increased amount of fly tipping, but since then it has reduced as people have got used to the hours. Cameras can be installed in fly tipping 'hot spots'.

Mr Atterwill agreed that everyone should be made to pay for their own asbestos disposal, but it should be a commercial operation and no individual should be undertaking asbestos disposal. He added that there had been a clear lack of foresight when the Beetley Recycling area was closed. The Dereham area has had no recycling area for many years due to the lack of planning by Norfolk County Council.

Question 2 from Mr G Northall, Chairman of Swanton Morley Cricket Club (Q3 Appendix A)
The education secretary announced that School Sports Partnerships (SSP's) were to be abolished, which the Prime Minister confirmed in the House of Commons, stating that they were a complete waste of money. After much condemnation by leading sportsmen and women there appeared to be a rethink. What is the present and future position of this valuable organisation? How will the proposed school Olympics be run and by whom?

Mr Freeman started by stating that he was a national politician who believed deeply in devolving services to local level. He explained that cuts had been made to local councils to help reduce the national debt, without such cuts the interest on the national debt would be £76b per annum. He advised that it was necessary to look at the way county politics were run, but stressed that Norfolk County Council must look at back office functions first – front line services should come at the very end of the process.

Mr Freeman advised that he was very passionate about sports and that he was disappointed with the government's original decision, however he was very pleased with the 'tyre screeching U turn' about the SSP's and would like to see more local businesses getting involved in this process.

Mr Borrett stressed that money from the SSP's goes directly to schools and Norfolk County Council takes no part in administering this. Norfolk County Council supports the Norfolk Playing Fields Association where a little bit of money administered by volunteers goes a long way.

Mr Freeman added that the administration of the proposed School Olympics was currently being looked at the by the government.

Question 3 from Mr C Perry – Head Teacher of Beeston Primary School (Q4 Appendix A)

The DFE definition of a small primary school is one of less than 200 pupils and a small high school is one of less than 600 pupils. The vast majority of our county's schools fall into this category.

- a. Small schools have very poor economies of scale and are therefore are expensive to run.
- b. Pupil performance and analysis data is flawed in small schools because the sample sizes are so small

However it is widely acknowledged, that with the demise of pubs and post offices, rural schools are often the last remaining emblem of vibrant communities. Yet these schools provide a level of nurture and personalised learning that large, more economically viable schools, can only dream of.

What assurances can be given by Norfolk County Council, or the Coalition Government as to their *commitment to the financial security and continuance* of these organisations? They do after all, represent the very essence of our rural Norfolk communities, and the very essence of the Big Society that we have heard so much about.

Mr Borrett stressed that he believed that village schools were vital, however the paperwork is difficult to manage in smaller schools. He suggested that smaller schools should look to share resources, giving the example of North Elmham and Bawdeswell who share a head teacher. He also suggested the new proposal of keeping schools in individual villages but sharing a governing body.

Mr Freeman added that the government was of the belief that 'small is beautiful' and it is government policy to encourage small schools. Part of this policy is to allow schools to move away from bureaucracy and form filling.

Mr Stasiak was not of the opinion that this was a planning matter however Mr Atterwill disagreed, arguing that it should be planning policy to encourage affordable family housing into villages to use village schools and services. Swanton Morley has played its part in supporting its school and services by agreeing to 50 new homes under the Local Development Framework and accepting a further 20 homes under a windfall development. It is the responsibility of this generation to pass communities onto the next generation in good health.

Mr Perry thanked the panel for their answers and re-iterated the vulnerability of smaller schools.

Comment from the Floor

More focus should be placed on developing starter homes for young people.

Mr Stasiak stressed that 40% of all new developments should now be affordable, however there is a lack of infrastructure in local towns and villages. Mr Borrett added that some villages will have their settlement boundaries removed under the Local Development Framework, which in some cases will not be a good thing as it will prevent any development in these areas.

Mr Atterwill advised Mr Stasiak that developers are finding ways to circumvent the 40% rule on affordable housing and asked how this could be stopped. Mr Stasiak was unable to answer. Mr Atterwill also asked Mr Stasiak to take back to Breckland District Council the comment that more employment opportunities are needed in the villages. It is all very well building houses in the towns and villages, but without places for business and industry, people will have to travel out of Mid Norfolk to find work.

Comment from the Floor

Disagreement that schools are not a planning issue. There are 2 high schools in Dereham that are already at capacity. Building more houses and expecting children to go to the Dereham High schools is not an option as the Dereham infrastructure cannot cope.

Question 4. Mr Fairchild advised that there had been several questions relating to the delegation of powers to Parish Councils (from Mr Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council and Mr Poulter, Brettenham and Kilverstone Parish Council). These included the fact that the money will still come from council tax payers, it will just be assigned to another tier of local government. Also whether Norfolk County Council will provide support to Parish Councils. (Questions 2, 8, 10, 11 and 12 Appendix A)

Mr Fairchild also added that Norfolk County Council and Breckland District Council get financial support from the government for every pound they spend, Parish Council's do not get this.

Mr Borrett stressed that he believed in the 'localler the better'. People on the ground are in a better place to make decisions on local matters. Quality Councils do a lot for their villages and Norfolk County Council should support parishes to take over the work. Forums have been held with parish and town councils to discuss this and he thanked Mr Atterwill for attending both meetings.

Parishes are, understandably, suspicious that they are being encouraged to increase their precept. Parishes want training and they want to know the current costs for these services to Norfolk County Council so they can set their own budgets. Parishes taking on delegated responsibilities will be

supported by Norfolk County Council, however if parishes do not want to take on more responsibility, Norfolk County Council cannot force the extra services on to them.

Mr Fairchild asked Mr Freeman about the impact on parishes of the Localism Bill. Mr Freeman believed passionately in the Localism Bill, and is of the opinion that the State has become too big and that locality should have more powers. He stressed that there would be limits for parishes, in that they would not be expected to take on complex issues such as mental health, but realistic services would be grass cutting. However he warned that the funding may not be sufficient and that villages may have to rally to get volunteer help. He stressed that he only wants the services to be delegated, not the bureaucracy. Mr Atterwill was of the belief that the delegation of services is very good in theory, however, Norfolk County Council has not really looked into the detail of the matter and until they do this delegation just won't work. Some Parish Councils (eg: Cringleford) already take on devolved services, however Norfolk County Council will not guarantee their current level of funding. He asked that, if the Parish Council precept would have to go up to cover these services, would the Norfolk County Council element of the council tax for the corresponding period go down?

Mr Atterwill advised that he had requested the figures from Derrick Murphy on 21st December, on how much it costs Norfolk County Council to run services in Swanton Morley, however he had yet to receive a response.

Mr Atterwill also queried the number of volunteers who would be willing to take on services, if a legally binding contract was expected to be entered with Norfolk County Council.

Question from the Floor

Are you happy for grounds staff to lose their jobs by getting volunteers to cut grass on the cheap?

Mr Freeman responded that if the villages of Norfolk can cut grass and save money then this would be a good thing.

Question from the Floor – Mr Marsham

Many footpaths run past land belonging to farmers and these farmers have the necessary experience and equipment to clear footpaths. Can these farmers not be given subsidies to clear footpaths?

Mr Borrett responded that about 20 farmers in Norfolk are approved contractors to clear snow from footpaths, however they have to go through expense and bureaucracy every year to be approved contractors. He believes that parishes can take away this bureaucracy.

Question from the Floor – Mr Sommerville

How is Norfolk County Council going to finance the logistical support for parishes?

Mr Borrett responded that there is not yet an agreed model but stressed that there are financial pressures. He admitted that Norfolk County Council should do more than it has done in the past to provide advice and support parishes. Norfolk County Council may be able to offer a countywide insurance policy to cover the services delegated to parishes.

Mr Alston advised that Norfolk County Council's insurance policy for snow clearance now covers all parishes who have accepted the delegated responsibility.

Question from the Floor – Mr Marsham

Why did the Mill Street widening project immediately get awarded to May Gurney, who then immediately sub contracted it down? Why did it not go out to tender?

Mr Alston replied that May Gurney is the sole contractor for Highways matters and was awarded this contract as a result of going out to tender in 1998/1999. Just recently Norfolk County Council has renegotiated terms with May Gurney and as a result reduced costs to Norfolk County Council has been achieved.

Mr Atterwill asked how much the annual spend was with May Gurney. Mr Alston was unable to answer at present.

Mr Atterwill asked how Norfolk County Council can assure the tax payer that best value is being achieved. Mr Alston responded that Norfolk County Council can re-tender in 2014. Mr Borrett added that every year May Gurney is bench marked against other contractors and it was felt that no other contractor could give a better deal.

Mr Atterwill was of the opinion that this contract should go out to competitive tender every 3-5 years. He went on to say that in his opinion it cannot be considered good practice that May Gurney have not retendered for this contract during the last twelve years.

Question from the Floor

The above matter should have been flagged in the annual audit.

Mr Borrett advised that the council is audited. The contract with May Gurney deserves scrutinising and this was part of the financial review. He will follow this up.

Comment from the Floor

It is suggested that Norfolk County Council does not know a lot about the letting of contracts

Mr Borrett agreed with this comment, which is why Norfolk County Council is setting up the 'Programme Management Office', which will employ the experience necessary to run a more financially efficient council. Pippa Bestway (formally of Aviva) will head up this department and she will be responsible for overseeing the procurement of contracts. The Programme Office will give advice to individual departments on how to make financial savings and scrutinise the procurement of contracts.

Question from the Floor

Would the services of the Programme Office be available to Parish Councils?

Mr Borrett responded that it is not currently in the brief but it would be worth considering.

Mr Atterwill questioned what the set up costs for the Programme Office were? Mr Borrett responded that he did not have these to hand but would send these to Mr Atterwill.

Question from the Floor

Breckland District Council promotes the fact that it has the lowest District Council Tax in the country. With their settlement from the government being less than expected, can you give best value and best services on the lowest council tax?

Mr Stasiak replied that Breckland District Council could.

Mr Freeman Left the Meeting as he had to Travel Back to London. Mr Fairchild Thanked Mr Freeman for his Attendance

Question 5 – Mr R Smith (Q16 Appendix A)

It has recently been reported in the local press that Breckland Council has purchased two shops and a car park in Thetford town centre for £3.5 million. Does the panel think that this is the best use of this money in the present economic climate?

Mr Stasiak advised that this purchase will give best value as it will achieve a return in excess of 7%.

Mr Carrick stressed that there are only certain things councillors are allowed to spend capital reserves on.

Mr Atterwill advised that he agreed in principle with an investment return of £250,000 per annum, however there could be more creative ways of investing in the Breckland area. If Breckland District Council were to invest in the creation of say a 'Dereham Business Park' a return would be seen on the investment though unit rental. It would also provide much needed space for business investment in the area, which would lead to employment opportunities for local people. This would result in greater tax revenue. It would be ideally located on the A47 corridor, which would not only make businesses more accessible, but allow access for young people to attend training centres. This proposal would create an income for Breckland Council and provide extra opportunities for the local area.

Mr Stasiak responded that this would mean Breckland District Council getting involved in business, which they were not permitted to do. Mr Atterwill advised Mr Stasiak that he had misunderstood the proposal, all Breckland District Council would need to provide were the business units and infrastructure.

Question from the Floor

Is this investment similar to that of the purchase of Barnham Broom which is losing money?

Mr Stasiak stressed that Barnham Broom was a sound investment and if it were to be sold today it would make a profit.

Question from the Floor

What did Breckland District Council receive back from its investment in Icelandic Banks?

Mr Stasiak advised that 54% has been returned, and the rest will be coming back.

Mr Borrett advised that Norfolk County Council has had a similar percentage returned and is awaiting the outcome of a legal case to ensure that Norfolk County Council becomes a preferential creditor.

Question from the Floor – Mr H Harris

What is being done with the old Dereham swimming pool site?

Mr Borrett responded that it is owned jointly by Norfolk County Council and Breckland District Council.

One sale of the site has fallen through, they are just awaiting another buyer to come on the market.

Question 6

Mr Fairchild advised that several questions had come in about the cuts to vulnerable people – Mrs J Stone and Mrs J Ironside had raised concerns about the future of Dereham Day Services (Appendix A Qs 5 and 20. Mrs Vyse and Mrs Freemantle had raised concerns about the future of youth services (Appendix A Qs 15 and 17). Mrs LeBon had raised concerns about proposed cuts for children with special education needs in schools (Appendix A Q13). Mrs Monaghan and Mrs Chapman raised concerns about the cuts in funding for people with sensory Deprivation (Appendix A Qs 18 and 19) and Mrs Drury and Mr Crate (Chairman of Mid Norfolk Mencap) all raised concerns about changes to the eligibility criteria with regards to care needs. All were gravely concerns about the effects of the quality of life to those who the cuts would impact on.

**Question from the Floor – Mrs Drury
Has Mr Borrett ever visited Dereham Day Services?**

Mr Borrett advised that he had not had any personal experience of the services they provide. He recommended that Cllr Harwood respond to Mrs Drury directly.

Mr Fairchild advised that Mrs Ironside had suggested some ways in which Dereham Day Services could make some income. These can be forwarded to Norfolk County Council to form part of the Big Conversation Debate.

Mr Atterwill recommended that Mr Borrett visit Dereham Day Services and also care homes for the elderly as it us a very uplifting experience. A decision needs to be made about what is important and whether we would be prepared to pay more tax to help these people. Giving personal care budgets for people to directly access services is not going to work as there will be no services left to spend the money on. Transport budgets are also going to be cut so these vulnerable people are going to end up housebound and have a depleted quality of life.

He provided a calculation in that cutting senior officers salaries by 10%, councillors' expenses by 10% and removing the budget for civic ceremonies, political purposes and Your Norfolk magazine would save £619,000. Over 3 years this would help cover the proposed budget cuts for children with Special Education needs in schools.

Mr Borrett made no disagreement over Mr Atterwill's comments and stressed that Norfolk County Council had already made the deputy Chief Executive redundant therefore saving £200,000 p/a

Mr Atterwill agreed that make the deputy chief executive redundant was a good thing, but he had been replaced by the Programme Management Office department, therefore no savings at all had been made. Mr Atterwill suggested making savings through the Norse Group which posted a loss of £2.75m last year, and Norfolk County Council is the only shareholder of this group. Mr Borrett argued that Norse is a good company for Norfolk County Council as it does a lot of work out of the county and the loss posted was only an 'accounting loss' and not an operational loss.

Comment from the Floor – Mr Crate – Mid Norfolk Mencap

The eligibility criteria is the key to this issue, and the proposed cuts will affect about 40% of people with Learning Disabilities. Norfolk County Council's proposals are an unfair way of cutting funding and it is a disgrace that people with learning disabilities are being made to suffer, when they had nothing to do with the current financial crisis.

Question from the Floor

Please explain the processes from this point – how do you prioritise cost savings versus vulnerability?

Mr Borrett advised that all comments up until 10th January will be published, but all comments coming from this meeting will be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration, along with Norfolk County Council's statutory duties. There will be a complex methodology that will be put on the website for people to see.

Comment from the Floor

We have a duty to safeguard vulnerable people and their services. If more money is needed then raise taxes.

Mr Borrett advised that raising taxes is not really an option, because the government has advised that if county councils increase their council tax by less than 2.5%, then a government grant of an extra 2.5% will be given to that council.

Comment from the Floor

Norfolk County Council must consider the Equality Act 2010. Equality Impact Statements must be put forward and Norfolk County Council must show they have considered the impact on vulnerable groups.

Comment from the Floor

The fact that cuts to vulnerable people can devastate families needs to be reinforced to Norfolk County Council. These vulnerable people cannot speak for themselves.

Question from the Floor – Mr P Crate

When will the public be made aware of the decision of Norfolk County Council's budget from 1st April?

Mr Borrett explained that it is being discussed by Cabinet on 14th February. Cabinet will then make recommendations to full council, who have the power to make the final decision. Full council does not necessarily have to agree with Cabinet recommendations.

Question from the Floor – Mr B Marsham

Should Norfolk County Council Councillors get paid expenses if they are elected to represent the people but do not turn up to meetings?

It was agreed that this was a matter for each individual council.

Question 7 – Mrs F LeBon (Appendix A Q14)

As a Dereham resident I was consulted on the proposal to turn off street lights between midnight and 5am. I responded to this consultation expressing grave concerns and requesting a personal response to discuss my concerns. I note from your Big Conversation proposals that you have already agreed to this 'big switch off'. I have not been able to find the results of the street light consultation on your website, nor did I ever receive a personal response to discuss my concerns.

- **Can I please reiterate my concerns on behalf of young people (myself included!) who enjoy the safety of street lighting to enable them to walk home safely after enjoying a social event that may go on longer than the street lights stay on.**
- **My personal experience of the street lighting switch off consultation suggests that this was an exercise to 'tick boxes' to show only that a consultation was sent out and not to listen to the views of the people it will affect. How can I be assured that the Big Conversation isn't a similar exercise?**

Mr Borrett advised that he was not involved in the street lighting consultation but personal feedback to him from villages was that people wanted the lights turned off. Mrs LeBon advised that it was not so much the result but the process of the consultation. Mr Fairchild asked whether the results of the street lighting consultation were ever published? Mr Borrett responded that he wasn't sure but he would get the results to Mrs LeBon.

Question from the Floor

Why are all the street lights being replaced in Dereham, particularly as the lights seem dimmer?

Mr Borrett advised he couldn't comment.

Mr Duigan (Dereham Town Council) advised that it was a PFI initiative, and he had received two complaints about the lights being too bright.

Question 8 – Mr A Sommerville CPM (Appendix A Q6)

As Norfolk County Council has made much of the financial cuts and have constantly said that "we are all in it together," will the County and District Councils be making a decision to cut their own allowances and special allowances awarded to Councillors thus reflecting the same level of cuts it is proposing to services?

Mr Stasiak responded that Breckland District Council had elected to take no increase in councillor allowances. Mr Fairchild reminded him that the question was 'cuts' in allowances, not 'freezes'. Mr Stasiak continued that an independent remuneration committee had recommended him for an increase in expenses due to his new role as deputy leader, but he had refused the increase.

Mr Borrett responded that councillors being paid expenses was a good thing as it enables those who are younger and not so wealthy to participate in local democracy. He also stated that not paying allowances would be discriminating against women who often have a family to look after. Furthermore, he stated that now Parish Clerks were paid, so should Parish Councillors be permitted expenses.

Mr Fairchild reminded Mr Borrett that Parish Councillors have the power to claim expenses, they just choose not to. Mr Borrett was unaware of this.

Mr Atterwill suggested that as Norfolk County Council is expecting their staff to take a cut, if councillors took a similar cut it would be a true gesture of 'all being in it together'.

Comment from the Floor

Would like to see people with the power to reduce expenses

Comment from the Floor

Councillors are simply doing the dirty work of the government, and suggested methods in which the government could be saving money, including cutting of benefit fraud and the cutting on non means tested benefits for the elderly (including the winter fuel allowance).

Comment from the Floor

Looked after children cost a lot of money and preventative measure would save this cost, but the preventative measures appear to be the services being cut. Norfolk County Council's proposals also do not encourage ambition in young people (eg: cuts in travel allowances). Along with government proposals to scrap the EMA and increase university tuition fees there is no incentive for a young person to be ambitious.

Mr Borrett argued that the preventative measures are being put in by the creation of the Programme Management Office.

Mr Atterwill argued that a large preventative measure, which is the Youth Service, is being scrapped altogether. This has been an invaluable resource in Swanton Morley by helping reduce anti social behaviour in the village. He urged Norfolk County Council to reconsider this decision, as young people are the future of this country.

Question from the Floor

What are the proposals in relation to libraries?

Mr Borrett advised that there were no proposals to close libraries, however the way they work may change, including reduced opening hours and being manned by volunteers. As Broadband is so patchy in Norfolk, some people only obtain a good internet service via libraries so it is imperative they stay open.

Comment from the Floor

We've heard a lot about Norfolk County Council's proposals for savings however we have not had any new ideas about what we would be prepared to see cut.

Comment from the Floor

Norfolk County Council needs to support volunteers more

Comment from the Floor

Cut out the NDR

Comment from the Floor

The County Council is too restricted by bureaucracy with regards to their suppliers. They are restricted to a small group of approved suppliers, whereby a local person could provide this service more cheaply.

Mr Borrett endorsed this saying he would like to see local suppliers used more.

Mr Atterwill added that he had experienced examples where, on a like for like quotation, more money had to be spent by purchasing goods from an approved supplier. Savings could easily be made by 'shopping around'.

The meeting closed at 10pm

Mr Fairchild thanked the panel and members of the public for attending.

The Big Conversation

Swanton Morley Village Hall 14th January 2011

Appendix A

1. Certain aspects of proposed cuts will have unintended but predictable consequences. Does the panel agree that the cessation of refunds for asbestos disposal at waste disposal sites and the reduction of hours that recycling centres are open will increase fly tipping in our county?

Mr T Poulter, Brettenham and Kilverstone Parish Council

2. Does the panel agree that delegating services to Parish Councils will simply mean that the same money to fund these services will still come from the same source – the tax payer through their council tax – but will be allocated to a different tier of local government?

Mr T Poulter, Brettenham and Kilverstone Parish Council

3. The education secretary announced that School Sports Partnerships (SSP's) were to be abolished, which the Prime Minister confirmed in the House of Commons, stating that they were a complete waste of money. After much condemnation by leading sportsmen and women there appeared to be a rethink. What is the present and future position of this valuable organisation? How will the proposed school Olympics be run and by whom?

Mr G Northall – Chairman of Swanton Morley Cricket Club

4. The DFE definition of a small primary school is one of less than 200 pupils and a small high school is one of less than 600 pupils. The vast majority of our county's schools fall into this category.
 - a. Small schools have very poor economies of scale and are therefore are expensive to run.
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However it is widely acknowledged, that with the demise of pubs and post offices, rural schools are often the last remaining emblem of vibrant communities. Yet these schools provide a level of nurture and personalised learning that large, more economically viable schools, can only dream of.

What assurances can be given by Norfolk County Council, or the Coalition Government as to their ***commitment to the financial security and continuance*** of these organisations? They do after all, represent the very essence of our rural Norfolk communities, and the very essence of the Big Society that we have heard so much about.

Mr C Perry, Head Teacher of Beeston Primary School

5. Is the County Council able to guarantee the future of Dereham Training Centre? This facility is an essential part of the daily life of many young, and not-so-young, people

with learning difficulties in central Norfolk. So many of the proposed cuts appear to be aimed at disadvantaged people who cannot stand up for themselves. If this centre closes, it would be a devastating blow not only to the users themselves but also to their parents and carers.

Judy Stone, Resident of Swanton Morley

6. As Norfolk County Council has made much of the financial cuts and have constantly said that "we are all in it together," will the County and District Councils be making a decision to cut their own allowances and special allowances awarded to Councillors thus reflecting the same level of cuts it is proposing to services? (Information Note: County Council Allowances are: General Allowance: £8,929; Special Responsibility Allowances range from £3,917 for Chairman of Committees to £13,016 for Cabinet members excluding the Leader: District Council Allowances are: General Allowance - £5,200; Special Responsibility Allowances range from £1,820 to £11,050 excluding the Leader.]

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

7. Is the basis for these cuts is financial what service and administrative costs re fees chargeable to the public will the Councils be increasing? (e.g. Licensing and planning application fees etc.)

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

8. What strategic plan has been formulated at County and District Levels to ensure a smooth transfer of any services from them to a lower echelon of local authority and what type of training programme or advisory facilities will be made available to these lower echelons of local government to ensure that the supply of any service at this new level are fit for purpose?

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

9. On 13th December 2011 Cllr. Borrett briefed Swanton Morley Parish Council that he was setting up a 'Programme Management Office.' How will this office be structured and run; by whom and how will it be staffed (e.g. council officers or new personnel) and is it currently in place? What will the operating costs of the unit be and where on the Council's website are details of this unit located?

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

10. A number of the services currently being carried out by Councils are a statutory requirement. How does the Council propose to delegate such statutory requirements to the lower echelons of government?

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

11. Does the Parish Council have access to the expertise required to process any new services being devolved to them and what will be the financial impact on the Parish Council funds if these requirements have to be outsourced? If, as a result of outsourcing, Parish funds are seriously depleted then how will any financial shortfall be met? (e.g. will it be necessary to increase in the Precept for the village?)

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

12. Are there any contingency funds available at Central Government, County or District level to assist Parishes in meeting any new financial commitments where paying for the new services could result in a financial deficit for the Parish?

Mr A Sommerville CPM, Swanton Morley Parish Council

13. Norfolk County Council proposes to reduce its budget for children in schools with Special Education Needs by 45% (Proposal B6), yet is of the opinion that completely devolving this reduced budget directly to schools will compensate for this reduction. Norfolk County Council has already reduced the amount of hours that it will fund for children with Statements of Special Education Needs, even though these children spend no less time being educated by schools, leaving the schools to juggle their budgets to be able to fund the shortfall – often by non-stop fundraising. Cutting this budget will inevitably lead to the reduction of hours for Teaching Assistants who are assigned to children with Special Educational Needs. I put it to the panel that not only is this drastic reduction in budget against policies to include children with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools – a policy that is put in place not only for these individual children, but is beneficial to children in the whole school to learn that every child is different, but is no less equal. But without the valuable help of teaching assistants assigned to children with Special Educational Needs, that child will have difficulty with mainstream lessons, become frustrated and inevitably become disruptive to the whole class.

- a. What efficiencies could individual schools possibly put in place to make up 45% of invaluable Teaching Assistant time?
- b. How can Norfolk County Council be truly independent in their decisions to give statements of Special Educational Need to children (which means they have a statutory obligation to give extra funding for that child) when their target as part of the Big Conversation is to reduce the number of Statements given out? Does the panel agree that this lack of independence could mean that Statements will be awarded based upon what is in the budget at the time and whether the ‘quota’ of Statements has been filled, rather than the needs of the individual child?

Mrs F LeBon - Governor Scarning Primary School

14. As a Dereham resident I was consulted on the proposal to turn off street lights between midnight and 5am. I responded to this consultation expressing grave concerns and requesting a personal response to discuss my concerns. I note from

your Big Conversation proposals that you have already agreed to this 'big switch off'. I have not been able to find the results of the street light consultation on your website, nor did I ever receive a personal response to discuss my concerns.

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- b. My personal experience of the street lighting switch off consultation suggests that this was an exercise to 'tick boxes' to show only that a consultation was sent out and not to listen to the views of the people it will affect. How can I be assured that the Big Conversation isn't a similar exercise?

Mrs F LeBon – Dereham Resident

15. RE: B11 CEASE COUNTY COUNCIL FUNDING FOR YOUTH SERVICES

The consultation document does not show any analysis of the cost savings of the cessation of funding for Youth Services, versus the additional cost to other services to overcome problems and issues that will ensue (eg, cost to policing areas due to increased drug abuse, increased anti-social behaviour, vandalism etc.) It is impossible, therefore, to make any sound comment or have an informed opinion on whether there would be any cost savings and therefore whether the withdrawal of funding is justified. Along with a number of other people, we run a totally voluntary Youth Club for our village. Our organisation relies heavily on access to professional and expert advice on all matters "youth", particularly with regard to red tape and legal obligations, but also for ideas and updates on current issues that we can/should be addressing with the disadvantaged, disenfranchised and vulnerable children/youth.

- a. If NCC ceases funding for youth work - where will the voluntary sector gain such information, at what cost and, there by implication, what impact will it have on the children we are looking to protect if such access is not available or too expensive?
- b. If NCC withdraw funding for existing youth work projects, when will this be effective from and what contingencies are in place for continuation of the work - bearing in mind that a lot of youth work is carried out during office hours and a *vast majority* of volunteers are in full time work and therefore cannot carry out voluntary work during office hours.
- c. Our Youth Club runs the Junior Achievement Awards for 7 - 11 year olds. One of the key points for this national scheme is that it can help to include children who may not have such academic drives and are therefore not seen to be successful at school. The JAA are great at encouraging children to see how their hobbies and interests encompass subjects covered at school and give them encouragement through achievement. Under the NCC consultation for youth work, the DoE and JAA awards will lose funding from NCC. Why then are NCC promoting a scheme, "Children's University" in the latest "Your Norfolk", that appears to be addressing children who already have a sense of inclusion in the education process - at the cost of those

children who are not?

Mrs S Freemantle – Co-ordinator, Northwold Youth Club

16. It has recently been reported in the local press that Breckland Council has purchased two shops and a car park in Thetford town centre for £3.5 million. Does the panel think that this is the best use of this money in the present economic climate?

R Smith – Dereham Resident

17. Norfolk County Council is proposing to cease funding of all youth services in Norfolk. Can the panel comment on how the needs of the majority of young people will be met by universal youth services, e.g. positive youth activities like youth clubs and/or safe places for young people to meet, as well as the needs of the more vulnerable young people who may require support during their adolescence from appropriate and qualified youth workers?

Mrs L Vyse – District Youth Worker and Swanton Morley Resident

18. Re: Proposal A15 – Cessation of Sensory Support (SEE ATTACHED LETTER)
- a. Why does the Norfolk County Council have to choose to pick on the most Vulnerable people who are Deaf/Blind in this world?
 - b. If the Council close the Sensory Support Unit & Communicator Guides Service how and where can Deaf/Blind people get the help they need?
 - c. Have you even thought what life is like for a Deaf/Blind person?
 - d. If they close Sensory Support and Communicator Guides Service how can we be a part of the Community?
 - e. As Communicator Guides they are our Eyes, Ears & indecent, Why take the Service away from the most Vulnerable people in this world?

Mrs K Monaghan – North Walsham Resident

19. I have just been advised that Norfolk County Council funded sign language lessons for my deaf child will cease in April. If my husband and I want this invaluable service to continue (and we do as it enables my child to better integrate with 'normal' society) we will have to fund this privately. The cost of this will be in excess of £500 per year. Can Norfolk County Council justify this cost to families, especially with the current increased cost of living and recent VAT rises?

Mrs J Chapman – Scarning Resident

20. Could the Panel please tell us why:
- a. The cuts have to impact on the most vulnerable in society by the reasons below.

- i. What is the point of not only running down the Dereham Day Services for vulnerable people with learning difficulties (which incidentally has been going on for a number of years, despite constant assurances that it was not) And now the proposal is for it to close, and these disabled people are to be pushed out into the 'community' It would be a highly retrograde step to close the Dereham Days Services for adults with learning difficulties, It provides a safe, purpose built hub, with facilities for special care and it acts as a social centre. This centre is well liked and at the centre of Norfolk. The Day centre is a valuable source of respite for more often than not, elderly carers who already save the tax payer millions of pounds a year by their unpaid caring work 24/7.
- ii. The best solution to financial difficulties in this case would be to revitalize the site, open up the gardens and greenhouses (which used to be buzzing with activity) to other disadvantaged groups, i.e. children's services and older people. Get the land productive and bring the public to buy plants and produce, like they used to. thus bringing life to the whole community and using this wonderful space with imagination to not only save money but make it too. This purpose building has wonderful workshops which in the past would be full of productive energy, why not get the life back into this place, with vision and imagination the day service could be a beacon for social care, as it used to be, providing useful items for the public to buy, and rewarding work for the clients. There is also nothing wrong with contract work. Reopen the kitchens and get groups cooking meals for meals on wheels and the local industrial estate. If not all the land can be used then rent out allotments to local people there could be interesting spin offs. There is nowhere else for these people to go PLEASE USE YOU'RE IMAGINATION!!!!!! IT COULD BE DONE. Do not let the care for this group of vulnerable people, who cannot speak up for themselves slip back to the dark ages of the Victorians. After all the mark of a civilized society is the degree to which it cares for the weakest, the young the elderly and vulnerable in that society.

b) Is it true that the mobility component of the DLA is to be axed to those people who live in local Care homes?

Do not cut the Mobility component of the DLA to people with learning difficulties in care homes. These valuable places are already struggling to cope with dedicated staff on very low wages. To cut the mobility component would jeopardize care to this vulnerable section of society, and severely curtail their ability to access society

c) As to the eligibility criteria, raise that at your peril, people rated at the substantial level in care homes and living with often elderly and vulnerable parents are at a severe risk of slipping to the critical level, if their eligibility at the substantial level is removed.

Mrs J Ironside- Swanton Morley Resident

21. What faith can the parishioners of Swanton Morley have in this process when irregularities in the LDF Consultation led to Swanton Morley being allocated more houses than was wanted, and we have been totally ignored over the parishioners' wishes for the social housing site on Middleton Avenue.

Mr S Westbury – Swanton Morley Parish Councillor

22. Norfolk is one of only a small number of Local Authorities that propose to disregard peoples care needs if they have been assessed as having only substantial care needs and provide, under the proposed change of Eligibility Criteria to critical only. This is likely to affect approximately 770 people with a learning disability currently receiving services assessed as substantial.

Many of these people and their families will be devastated by this proposed change with many vulnerable people left floundering in our local communities. Bearing in mind that Learning Disability is a life long disability, albeit at various levels, would the panel agree that there is a special case to retain services for people with a learning disability currently as being assessed as substantial?

Peter Crate – Chairman Mid Norfolk Mencap

23. We are parents of a severely disabled daughter. Our question is in two parts. We have been told that the eligibility of those entitled to a care budget is highly likely to be cut, so that only people assessed as having 'critical' needs will be eligible and those assessed as having 'Moderate' or 'Substantial' needs will no longer receive a care budget. We have also been made aware that as from April those living in residential care or in their own homes will have the mobility component removed from their Disability Living allowance. This is taking away people's human rights as will cause many to become housebound:

- a. We would like to know if the MP's are aware of the impact that these changes will have on the quality of life of the elderly, disabled and those with learning disabilities?
- b. Will you be making the government aware of this impact?

Mrs and Mrs Drury – Swanton Morley