

Report to Stanwick Parish Council meeting 20th September 2018

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Pre-budget Report

Background

The financial difficulties at Northamptonshire County Council will impact on all town and parish councils in the county and Stanwick Parish Council should be mindful of this when considering the financial requirements for 2019-2020 and beyond.

The parish of Stanwick is fortunate that it should not be affected by the withdrawal of bus subsidies, although this issue may arise when the s106 funding for the Sunday service runs out, assuming that the service is not commercially viable.

Recent announcements from Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) indicating that they need save a further £70 million on this year's budget and the likelihood that they will only undertake the statutory minimum of functions.

Potential impact on Stanwick Parish Council by NCC financial crisis

The reduction of services by NCC are likely to have the following impacts on Stanwick.

County verges – each year the Parish Council enters a s136 Highway Mowing Agreement with NCC which means that the Parish Council is responsible for arranging for the verges within the 30 mph signs, to be cut.

The Parish Council has always received an annual 'agency service' payment towards the cost of this works. In recent years this has been £405.32.

This does not cover the cost of cutting the verge as the Council has the verges cut more frequently than the NCC standard of three times a year.

It is likely that this payment will be withdrawn for 2019-2020 and may be withheld in 2018-19. At the very least, if the cut cycle is reduced to once a year, the payment will reduce proportionately.

Potential Impact – loss of income.

County verges outside of the 30 mph signs – It is probable that NCC will reduce the cuts of county verges in other parts of the parish to once a year. The Parish Council may want to take on grass cutting in these areas to improve the appearance of the parish.

Potential Impact – increase in Parish Council costs.

Reduction in weed spraying -

Adult social care – Stanwick residents could be adversely affected by the reduction in care and services.

In recent years, the withdrawal of NCC funding has meant that services such as ‘Chatterbox’ ceased in Stanwick. Chatterbox was a social group in Stanwick (and other locations) for the over 50s and vulnerable adults organised by Nene Valley Community Action.

The Parish Council may consider partnership working with St Laurence Church or Brockfield Nursing Home. St Laurence Church has instigated infrequent intergenerational sessions with children from Acorn Nursery and older residents. The activities co-ordinator at Brockfield Nursing Home is trying to set up regular coffee mornings for older Stanwick residents.

The Council could consider contracting the services of someone to co-ordinate similar to that of a youth worker but for older residents.

Library Services - The situation regarding the future of library provision is still very uncertain due to the successful high court challenge and other factors within NCC. In the event that Raunds Library is taken over by a community group, that group will require funding. There is a possibility that access to the library services will be restricted to those that have ‘paid in’, either as individuals or at an authority level.

I did set up a meeting with the community library committee to get a better understanding to the future provision of services but the committee cancelled.

Potential impact – increase parish cost or loss of service for residents

Election costs - District and parish elections are due to take place in May 2019. Where combined elections take place, the cost is proportionately split. If the parish elections go ahead in 2019 and the district elections do not, the parish would get 100% of the bill.

I have asked for predicted costs and ENC is not prepared to issue those before October.

The parish elections may be postponed to 2020 but this decision can only be made by central government and may not be made until early next year.

Potential impact – limited as the Parish Council has an election fund of £2500.00 which will hopefully off set the majority of the cost. The council would need to rebuild this fund before the next election if it is used.

Withdrawal of councillor empowerment funds – until 31/03/2018 each county councillor has a ‘pot’ of £5000.00 to provide grant funding to projects within their ward. The withdrawal of this funding may result in an increased number of grant applications made to the Parish Council by Stanwick community groups.

Potential Impact – increased pressure on Parish Council funds

The future

What is not known is how long the 'statutory minimum' protocols will be in place nor whether they will be the operational practice of the new unitary. An increasing number of higher level authorities (county/unitary) are announcing their intention to provide only the statutory minimum and it would not be unreasonable to expect this to be the 'new normal' with non-statutory functions being left to parish and town councils.