

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Tax freeze for Derbyshire Dales residents

Derbyshire's top-performing local authority is again set to freeze its Council Tax for the coming year at just over 50p per household per day.

After making £1.3 million savings last year, Derbyshire Dales District Council has planned additional savings of £1.2 million in the next three years through a combination of measures, including reducing employee costs and continuing a comprehensive review of spending across all its services.

The good news for Dales residents is that their Council Tax is to be frozen for the second year, with the average bill for Derbyshire Dales' services maintained at £189.66 per year, equivalent to a weekly bill of £3.65, or just over 50p per household per day.

Despite receiving the lowest central Government grant of any council in the county, Derbyshire Dales District Council has pledged to make no reduction in services in the coming year.

A big factor in the savings is a new waste contract that will increase kerbside recycling opportunities for Dales residents while saving the District Council £385,000 a year. The contract, which includes plastic recycling collections for the first time, kicks in this summer.

In the coming year the District Council is tackling the impact of a 14.7% cut in Government grant following on from last year's swingeing 16.2% reduction.

The District Council is pledging to further reduce costs across all services, while minimising, as far as possible, the impact on residents.

Opportunities are being examined for shared services that deliver savings and bring about service improvements and although the District Council currently employs only 287 full-time equivalent staff (down from 330 a year ago), its workforce continues to be streamlined, wherever possible through voluntary redundancies.

The new budget will help the District Council to maintain revenue spending of around £8.7 million in the coming year, compared with £9.1 million last year and £10.4 million in 2010/11, focusing on priorities identified by local people – particularly affordable homes and economic support.

Derbyshire Dales District Council collects Council Tax not only to help to pay for its

own services, but also on behalf of other public bodies. The majority - around 70% - goes direct to Derbyshire County Council. Only about 12% contributes to the services provided by Derbyshire Dales District Council.

Councillor Lewis Rose OBE, leader of Derbyshire Dales District Council, said: "The coming year will be another where Derbyshire Dales District Council has to make savings while striving to maintain its status as a top-performing local authority that provides excellent services for local people.

"We have an enviable reputation of being a prudent council that listens to people, but each year since the current grant system was introduced in 2003, we have received a lower Government settlement than any other district in Derbyshire.

"We've tried to tough out the challenges up front, but we still have to find additional savings between now and 2015 of around £0.4 million. It may be an over-used phrase, but in 2012 we really will have to work harder than ever to continue to deliver top services for the people of the Derbyshire Dales.

"We have to be realistic and admit we won't be repeating anything in the foreseeable future as large-scale as the opening last year of our fabulously successful Arc Leisure Matlock.

"However, we take pride in being astute at benefiting our Council Tax payers by taking advantage of other money that is available for initiatives such as affordable housing. These grants have enabled us to deliver over 900 new affordable homes for local people in the past 10 years and, pleasingly, recent housing statistics reveal we have built more homes than the major urban areas of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham, and the fourth highest number of homes in the whole East Midlands region.

"Also, where we have been unable to afford to continue services, we have found ways of alternative provision, such as transferring Wirksworth Learner Pool to a charitable company and agreeing a new Visitor Information Point at Peak Rail's shop in Matlock as a value-for-money replacement for the town's Tourist Information Centre.

"So what we have to continue to do is secure value for money savings that make a difference. We are re-organising the way we work and are introducing initiatives such as the £385,000 a year we have saved on our new waste contract – a change that also improves household recycling and should help us achieve the Government's recycling target of 50% by 2020. These savings have helped us freeze Council Tax for the District Council at an average £189.66 per year, or around £3.65p per week.

"We always listen to what local people are saying. In the past year we have staged forums to discuss out budget proposals and invited feedback online and we promise to continue to consult vigorously, while also examining innovative ways of working, such as partnership working, shared services and outsourcing."

Revenue spending in 2012/13 will be focused on three priority areas following public consultation:

- Housing which meets local needs
- A clean, green and prosperous Dales
- Safe and healthy communities

Capital funding has been set aside in 2012/13 for the development of a new temporary car park in Matlock town centre on the former Lido site and for the revamping of public conveniences in rural areas following the opening of new facilities last year in Ashbourne, Bakewell and Matlock.

Since 2003, Derbyshire Dales District Council has achieved more than £4 million in efficiency savings. This despite now receiving 25% less central funding than when the grant system was introduced in 2003 – over 50% less in real terms, including inflation.

The Budget recommendations will be considered by a full meeting of the District Council this Thursday (1 March).

Derbyshire Dales District Council's achievements in 2011/12 include:

- ✓ 80 new affordable homes enabled. In total, the District Council has now enabled over 900 affordable homes in the District since 2002
- ✓ Carried out 17 licence responsibility awareness visits to premises licensed to sell or supply alcohol issued with crime reduction and prevention of nuisance conditions. At least a further 3 visits are planned before the end of the year
- ✓ Further reduced antisocial behaviour in the district
- ✓ Provided new / refurbished public conveniences in Ashbourne, Bakewell and Matlock
- ✓ Arc Leisure Matlock development opened on schedule, with 167,000 visits recorded in the first six months of operation
- ✓ Further increased attendance on our health walks
- ✓ Completed adaptations to the homes of 28 disabled people