

**EXTRACT FROM HALSTEAD LOCAL COMMITTEE 11<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009****33 PARISH SUPPORT GRANT**

The Chairman, Councillor Robert Bolton, introduced the item and stated his concerns on proposals to possibly cancel the Parish Support Grant (PSG). This has vital importance for local Members and it gravely affects many local people. The Chairman advised he had received over 30 emails from Parish Councils in the Halstead area recording their objections to the proposal.

John Bendall, Chairman of Earls Colne Parish Council, joined the table for this item and referred to Earls Colne Parish Council's letter to the Leader of the Council and to local members stating their objection to the PSG being withdrawn and the additional burden placed on Town and Parish Councils. The PSG was in place to compensate the parishes and towns for the unparished areas of the district. In an 'ideal world' if this was totally effective the precept put in by towns and parishes would have a precept close to zero. Mr Bendall stated that, as a private individual, he had obtained information under the Freedom of Information Act that for Parish Tax Band D if the average parish rate was applied to unparished areas it would accrue a total of £533,738 for the district.

The Leader of the District Council's letter to each Parish Council stated that 'reserves can be built up over the long term'. Earls Colne Parish Council has long term ongoing projects which are to be funded from reserves, and also a village hall maintenance fund. Communities who have the benefit of halls, maintained and run for them by BDC should also contribute in full, to bring them into line with the parishes.

Mr Bendall urged that these views are taken into account on this important issue, to ensure residents are treated equally and fairly for now and the long term.

Councillor M G Gage agreed with the views expressed by the two Parish Council speakers and the content of Earls Colne Parish Council's letter. The funding Braintree District Council pays to Parish Councils as a precept pays for concurrent functions – that means that services that would have been provided by BDC have been provided locally. If the concurrent functions cannot be funded they should be given back to Braintree. The 'Localism Agenda' is being promoted by government that means local decisions being made by the local people.

A proposal was made and seconded with support by other members opposing the removal of the PSG and that it would only be acceptable – as a principle – if other unparished areas in Braintree District are parished. This would result with revenue exceeding £500,000.

During the discussion the following issues were raised:

- On legislative aspects – some areas of the District are receiving a similar service and not being taxed and, it could be questioned, that Braintree District Council are over-taxing the precepting areas. If the PSG was to be abolished this would be more so and burden 70% of households
- that information from Council's, under Freedom of Information, may be incomplete with regard to costs of concurrent functions and these could, if analysed in more detail, be much larger. Concurrent functions cover all services that Town and Parish Councils can provide plus other items, e.g. swimming pools

- that the PSG received by small parishes may only meet part of their expenditure, and a main expense are local Village Halls that are essential to a village
- that residents in Braintree and Bocking are receiving their services for free
- the huge disparity in Parish precepting and the vast differences, with a lowest level at £13.74 per Band D property for Sturmer, and £88.49 per Band D property for Coggeshall. It was explained that different rates apply for larger villages as they have additional facilities to maintain, e.g. burial grounds, public toilets, car parks, or playing fields
- the whole issue of PSG should be debated at Full Council, and rectified for the future
- that a sub group consider the findings of the consultation process, and look at all aspects of equalisation and fairness
- that the Council are looking at all services to address the revenue shortfall

Councillor Mrs Pell proposed, and it was seconded, that the vote be recorded.

The result of the recorded vote was as follows:-

**For the Motion**

Councillors: Bolton, Collar, Mrs Gage, M Gage, McCrea, Mrs Pell, Mrs Scattergood and Shelton **(8)**

**Abstained**

Councillors Mrs Beavis, Harley, Siddall and Mrs Spray **(4)**

**Absent**

Councillors: Hume, Messenger, O'Reilly-Cicconi and Swallow **(4)**

The motion was declared **CARRIED**

Councillor Siddall requested it to be included in the minutes that it is regrettable that there are two elements to the motion. The whole Committee agrees that the PSG should not be withdrawn, and that there are elements of the motion, i.e. the incremental 10% increase per year, that makes the issue too complicated.

**DECISION:** That it be **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:-**

- (1) The Halstead Local Committee objects strongly to the proposal to abolish the Parish Support Grant and accordingly the Halstead Local Committee requests the Cabinet to establish a Member-led working party with officer support to consider how best and what level to tax the non-parished areas of Braintree District Council.

**RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL (subject to the decision of Cabinet in respect of recommendation (1):-**

- (2) That the PSG will be increased by at least 10% per annum until such time as the precepting parishes are fully compensated for the double taxation to which they are currently subjected.

## HALSTEAD LOCAL COMMITTEE

11<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009

### PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Statement by Paul Snashall, Chairman of Wickham St Paul Parish Council, and on behalf of the Maplesteads, Wickham St Paul, the Heddinghams & Gestingthorpe Cluster Group.  
Agenda Item 5(a) - Parish Support Grant

Mr Snashall advised that he had another meeting to attend otherwise he would have stayed for the Parish Support Grant item on the agenda.

Mr Snashall stated that all persons present at the Cluster Group meeting considered the proposals on Parish Support Grants – as they understood them from the announcement made at the recent Cabinet meeting – as ill conceived, inappropriate, and has lack of justification, particularly for small parishes. Some Parish Councils may have money in reserve, and for those who have managed to build these up they have been extremely prudent. More importantly, the money may have been held in reserve as they have ‘ringfenced’ it to spend on specific projects. Also, Parish Councils receive money in the form of bequests- this could be endangered if they think they are subsidising the efforts of Braintree District Council to balance their books.