

Local News and Views



Eddie Martin

Eddie Martin
Leader of Cumbria County Council

There are very few people today who are privileged enough not to have to count every penny they spend.

Most of us budget carefully: we know what we can afford, and what we can't we do without.

The temptation to buy and run into debt is enormous but there comes a time when we simply have to say 'no'.

That is the case for the county council. Over many years, the county has borrowed £324 million. It costs us £92,000 a day to repay and service that debt.

This has to stop.

That, amongst many other things is what I have been working on these past few months.

We have had to find £43 million of savings, and yet there are many things I would like to spend more on: children's services, highways, looking after elderly people, buses, libraries, fire fighters...the list goes on and on.

But with your help and advice, we have now completed our budget for the next 12 months and I am hopeful that most people in Cumbria won't notice too many changes. We are pleased to say, for example that council tax will not go up next year.

Some people will be affected: the majority of the 6,500 young people aged 16 to 19 who currently get free home to school transport may soon have to pay for the service. However, the county council's cabinet is due to make a final decision on a potential hardship fund in the coming weeks. This will aim to ensure that any child from a low income family will continue to receive the service free of charge.

Sadly also we are simply having to let some staff go. Many are taking voluntary redundancy and some have other jobs lined up, but as we all know, this is a difficult time to lose your job.

My view is that if just half of the 25,000 businesses in Cumbria took on an apprentice (for we need many more opportunities) we would almost eliminate youth unemployment.

We are reducing the number of subsidised bus routes but we have not closed any libraries, fire stations or Sure Start centres, and, following a recent government announcement we have received extra money for roads following two bad winters.

Be assured: we are listening and we are trying to make the savings as painless as possible for all of us.

If you would like Eddie Martin, Leader of Cumbria County Council, to visit **your parish council**, please contact Karen Strong on 01228 227 480 or email karen.strong@cumbriacc.gov.uk

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Budget consultation:

Your views lead to changes to savings proposals

More than 2,000 residents including many parish councillors had their say on our budget proposals through our recent consultation on priorities and spending options.

The consultation, from November to January, invited residents, councillors, businesses and interest groups to give their perspectives on how we should save £33 million in the next 12 months.

The feedback we received from parish councils and CALC reflected the wide range of issues which matter to people across Cumbria.

However, some proposals stood out as being of particular concern to you and your constituents.

As a result of your feedback, county councillors have now made their decisions about the future of these proposals.

The strength of feeling against implementing on-street parking charges in towns and tourist hotspots was clear. As a direct result of this feedback, councillors have decided not to introduce on-street parking charges.

Many people also felt that reducing the maintenance of rights of way to a statutory minimum would reduce opportunities to enjoy our outdoor landscape and also affect our economy as a result. Councillors have agreed to amend this proposal and to continue to work with the Lake District National Park authority and Carlisle City Council to provide higher levels of maintenance and support.

As a direct result of your feedback, councillors have also voted not to cut recycling credit payments to the third sector.

You told us that supporting Cumbria's economy should be a priority as it will help us achieve our priorities of reducing poverty and disadvantage.

If resources are available we propose to provide up to £1 million extra over two years for developing or selling surplus land for regeneration.



We are also proposing to put more resources toward improving broadband and mobile technology in Cumbria (see page 3 for more).

A number of parish councillors contacted us with their suggestions for making our services more efficient and better value for money, particularly through localising services. Developing locality working in Cumbria is high on our agenda – see page 6 for details of a recent conference about the future of locality working.

The savings options which have been approved by councillors will now begin to be put into place. We will keep you up to date with progress in future editions of Local News & Views and on our website.

For a full list of the decisions made by county councillors go online to cumbriacc.gov.uk and follow the link from the homepage.

FACT:

Just under 2000 people had their say through our budget consultation, and 5000 visited our dedicated website



Cumbria named as pilot to benefit from better broadband

Cumbria's ambition is to develop a first class broadband network across the whole of Cumbria and our strategy is to deliver this by attracting a range of external investment and support to make this possible.

To deliver this we have established a project known as Accessible Cumbria. We have now achieved an important step towards achieving our ambition. Cumbria has been selected as one of four 'pilot' areas in the country by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK).

Cumbria was chosen as a pilot because of its particular blend of rural and urban communities and because of the ambition that Cumbrian communities have shown in wanting to be at the forefront of technology and innovation. A number of the communities we are working with have also been recognised by the Government as good examples of the Big Society in action.

The work in the pilot areas are technical trials and are being led by BDUK and supported by the county council. These pilots are key to establishing an early insight into some of the issues we will need to address in the future if we are to be successful in delivering broadband to the whole county. As well as findings from the pilots, over the next three months the county council will also undertake a range of work to support the development of our long term ambition.

During this time we will:

- work with our communities and our key stakeholders;
- develop and deliver innovative, technological and long term sustainable solutions;
- stimulate external interest in investing in Cumbria, to attract the maximum amount of public and private sector funding.

Whilst the exact level of funding from BDUK is still to be confirmed, the first wave of work has already started. The council has already been asked to take on the role as responsible body for the Accessible Cumbria project by BDUK and we have recently issued a tender to establish the level of interest from external suppliers in this project.

For more information go to www.cumbria.gov.uk/broadband

FACT:

A 2010 survey of Cumbria businesses showed that 23% of businesses wanted to see higher speed broadband in the county.

This proportion was highest amongst respondents in Copeland (27%) while respondents in Eden were most likely to be satisfied with broadband speeds (70% were satisfied; 19% would like it to be faster).

The highest demand for internet was shown amongst accommodation and food services (32%), health services (30%), primary industries (29%), financial intermediation (28%) and business/technical services (27%).

Just 9% of businesses said they do not need broadband.

(Stats from Cumbria Business Survey 2010 – Cumbria Intelligence Observatory)

Cumbria's Libraries

is it time for change?

FACT:

Libraries aren't just about books. Many offer reading groups, health visitor clinics, family learning sessions and more.

We have now launched the first stage of a consultation looking at the future of Cumbria's library service. The process is expected to take most of 2011 and we hope that parish councils will take a keen interest. Unlike many others up and down the country, in its recent budget the council decided not to cut funding for the library service. But this doesn't necessarily mean we think that things should continue as they are.

We believe it is time to change how we think about libraries. For years the public debate in Cumbria has been about library buildings and opening hours. But is this really what libraries are about? We believe the debate needs to shift. We think we should be talking about how we can widen access, get more people reading more books and help people get the most out of the service.

We think this means using the money differently; getting books and resources out of buildings - that in some cases are closed most of the week - and into people's hands; changing the way people access the service; making the service fit for how things are now; and really getting communities involved.

What it doesn't mean is the arbitrary closure of libraries to make savings or making it harder for people to access the service.

Between now and 30th June we will be talking to library users, staff, councillors, community groups and the general public about our ideas. These conversations will help us refine and develop our ideas, or they may prompt us to change them completely.

In late summer the council's cabinet will decide whether it wants to proceed to formal consultation on a set of proposals for changes to the library service. If it does we would expect that consultation to take place between September and November. This not a fast process and we won't be making rushed decisions. We are determined to get the best possible service for Cumbria's future.

We have contacted parish councils directly to invite your input into this consultation. We have also set up a dedicated webpage where councillors and residents can give their views on our ideas and add their own. Go to cumbria.gov.uk for more information.



The future of Cumbria's subsidised bus routes

The council has made arrangements for which bus services it will continue to subsidise in the county. We have set aside over £1.5m in our budget to help continue 83 bus routes which provide a valuable service but which would otherwise be commercially unsustainable.

Of the nearly 19 million journeys made by bus in Cumbria each year, only 1.8 million are on services supported by the county council. The rest are made on commercially provided services, mostly provided by Stagecoach in Cumbria, which are completely unaffected by the council's review of subsidised services.

However, the scale of the council's budget cuts means we have been forced to reduce support for bus services by £340,000. 19 routes which are no longer sustainable were withdrawn on 30 April 2011. The bus services which are being withdrawn have been selected after a careful evaluation process which takes into account factors including cost per passenger, number of passengers and the availability of alternatives.

Broadly speaking, the routes selected are some of the least used in the county – only 3% of the passengers who currently travel on council-supported journeys use the buses being withdrawn. Some routes cost taxpayers nearly £15 for each passenger every time they get on a bus - which is impossible to justify in the current economic climate, particularly when alternative schemes such as Rural Wheels and the voluntary car scheme are already supported by the county council.

Cllr Tim Knowles, cabinet member for passenger transport, said: *“Given the scale of the spending cuts, we have to make some difficult decisions, but we’ve been fair, balanced and meticulous in making these decisions. In an ideal world, the council wouldn’t have to subsidise any bus services and they’d all be so popular with passengers that they would pay for themselves. But we’re living in the real world and we can’t carry on supporting a bus that is so under-used that it costs the public purse up to £15 per passenger every time the bus runs. We are committed to providing community transport and supporting schemes like the Rural Wheels initiative and voluntary car driver schemes.”*

Our question to you, parish councillors, is: would you consider raising your precept in order to continue to fund subsidised bus services in your area? Get in touch with us by email at parish.editor@cumbriacc.gov.uk to give your views on this or other steps which could help secure the future of council-subsidised busses. Details of all 19 routes, including information about cost per passenger and alternative transport options for each route, are available online at cumbria.gov.uk

Changes to concessionary travel in Cumbria

On Friday 1 April we took over responsibility from the six district councils for administering the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). This move follows a decision made by central government to transfer responsibility for concessionary travel to county councils and is being adopted all round the country. The scheme will provide free off peak travel on scheduled bus services for people of pensionable age and people with disabilities.

Cumbrian residents who currently have a NoWcard will be entitled to free bus travel between 9.30am and 11.00pm, Monday to Friday and all day Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays throughout England on local bus services. Existing NoWcard holders do not need to re-apply until their card expires.

People can visit any one of the county council's six main libraries in Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal, Penrith, Workington and Whitehaven to apply for a NoWcard. Library staff will electronically fill in the forms and take a photo of new applicants. People can also fill in an application form with staff at Kirkby Stephen Council Centre and Ulverston and Alston Local Links. Details of library opening times can be found on at cumbria.gov.uk.

People with disabilities who cannot travel without assistance will also be able to travel with a companion free of charge. This is a discretionary concession which the county council has decided to offer. Companions are only able to travel at the same time as the pass holder within the county's boundary.

For more information visit cumbria.gov.uk/transportandroads and follow links to concessionary travel or call the NoWcard helpline on **0845 058 1096**.

FACT:

97,000 people in Cumbria benefit from free travel thanks to their NoWcard

LOCALlinks

Community and councils come together to create better services in Kirkby Stephen

Work is nearing completion on an enhanced council and community one-stop-shop in Kirkby Stephen - a project which has seen the county, district and town council work closely with an active team of local residents.

The Local Links project is part of the council's wider aim to bring county and district council and community services together, making services more accessible for customers. The Town Council and residents have been closely involved in developing a new Local Links which will bring additional county and district council services together in one place in the formerly disused grade two listed old grammar school building.

The new premises will include the already established community and council centre and library. Currently these services in the town are based in a rented building with no disabled access. The new centre will now include a new children's centre as well as offering meeting rooms and extra IT facilities for use by the local community.

Alongside the £550,000 investment in the Local Links, in another important development for the local community, a new footpath is being created which will link the town's Settle-Carlisle line station with the town centre.

Kirkby Stephen residents have a long and proud history of getting involved in improving services and facilities in the town. The Upper Eden Community Planning Group was one of three vanguard areas identified by the coalition government as great examples of The Big Society in action.

Peter Thornton, County Councillor for Kirkby Stephen says:

“Residents in Kirkby Stephen and the Upper Eden Valley as a whole have always been extremely ‘hands on’ when it comes to the future of their community.”

“The new Local Links centre is another example of residents working very closely with local government at all levels to develop services that are cost effective, efficient, and tailored to the local community’s needs.”

“I hope that other communities can learn from the success that can be found by all three tiers of local government coming together with communities to shape and deliver local services.”

Both the Local Links and footpath will be officially opened later this year.

Locality working

Cumbria gets together for Big Society conference

A recent conference has celebrated the great examples of localism in Cumbria and examined how we can learn from the success stories which are helping build stronger communities in the county.

The conference was funded by Cumbria Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (CIEP) - a partnership between district and county councils, the national park authority, police and PCT - and organised by the Stronger group of the Safer and Stronger Thematic Partnership.

Attendees included parish councillors, district and county council members and officers, third sector organisations and community leaders. Together they looked at what the government's Localism Bill could mean for Cumbria.

The Stronger Group has agreed some next steps as a result of issues raised at the conference in order to make sure that improvements in locality working can become a reality. These include:

- Developing arrangements for disadvantaged and urban neighbourhoods
- Sharing the learning points from practical examples of locality working
- Celebrating and encouraging local diversity within a strong and agreed framework
- Strengthening elected members' role

For more information about the next steps from the event, go to cumbria.gov.uk/ciep. A DVD summarising the events will be available online soon.

This month will see the publication of our council plan for 2011-2014.



It will set out our priorities and aspirations for the next three years and the values that underpin our work.

The plan has been developed following extensive discussions and feedback from many of our stakeholders, including, of course, our parish council colleagues.

Your views and plans on a parish level have influenced and informed our direction over the coming three years.

As stated in the plan, we will be focussing on:

- Challenging poverty in all its forms
- Ensuring vulnerable people receive the support they need
- Improving the chances in life of the most disadvantaged

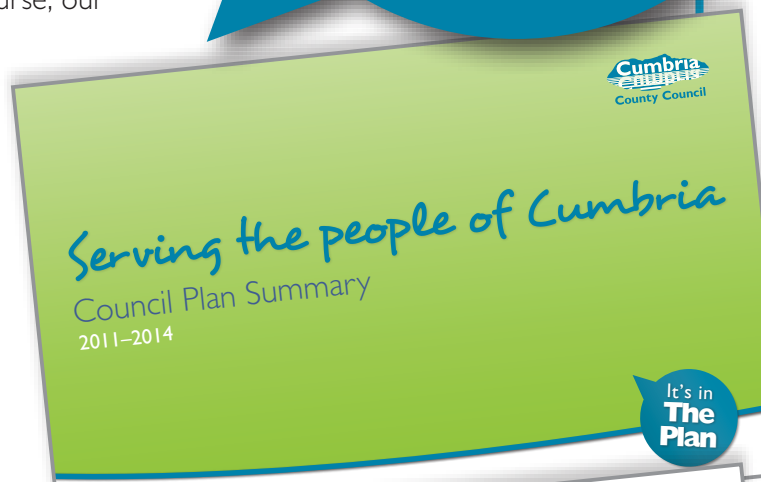
Underpinning this is our aim to be as effective and efficient as possible: we will prioritise services, targeting our resources where they are most needed; we will re-engineer services to find new, different and more efficient ways to do things; and, we will focus on our customers, putting people at the heart of everything we do.

Developing Cumbria's economy is also a key focus for us. The plan sets out what we will do to encourage business development, strengthen our workforce's skills, stimulate job creation and improve our infrastructure in order to ensure that Cumbria's economic position is strengthened. This includes improving broadband access – see page 3 for more.

We've created an online interactive summary which brings our plans to life. We feel this would be a useful resource in enabling residents to understand the council's priorities, and very much welcome your support in communicating this to your constituents.

The interactive council plan will be available online at cumbria.gov.uk later this month.

If you would like any more information regarding the plan or have any comments or feedback, please get in touch at parish.editor@cumbriacc.gov.uk



Lorna & David Graham- fosterers for 49 years – credit Stewart Carruthers



The photo shows **Lorna & David Graham** of Crackenthorpe, near Penrith, who have just retired after fostering for a record 49 years, holding the Big Book of Fostering. The Big Book is touring the North West during the You Can Foster campaign, capturing carers' thoughts and memories along the way. Lorna wrote: *'You can foster if you like a challenge, can offer a secure home environment, love children, stay calm in a crisis and expect no thanks – just the satisfaction of seeing a child blossom and reach their full potential.'*

You Can Foster! NW Regional Foster Carer Recruitment Campaign

'If you've room in your heart and room in your home, you can foster' – a foster carer

In a first for Cumbria, the county council has teamed up with 22 other local authorities from across the North West to find much needed new foster carers. We want 2011 to be the year that more people make a difference to a child's life by becoming foster carers.

There are lots of different types of fostering schemes, giving carers the flexibility to choose the option that suits them. We offer training, as well as practical, emotional and financial support; and want to encourage applications from people regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, marital or employment status – there's no typical foster carer.

In the words of one Cumbrian foster carer **"Fostering not only changes the lives of young people but it has improved my life as well."**

You can help

We want to make sure as many people as possible are aware of the urgent need for more foster carers, and of the part they could play in changing a child's life. Can you help by spreading the word to constituents, colleagues, friends or family you think might be interested? You can find more information at www.youcanfoster.org or by ringing **0800 634 7052**

FACT:

Nearly 50 Cumbrian children are waiting for a suitable foster placement (some are already in foster care but would be better matched in a different family; perhaps nearer to their home for example.)

We want to hear from you

We are keen that Local News and Views covers the issues that matter to you

Contact us with your comments on the articles we have covered in this edition or suggestions for us to cover in the summer edition at parish.editor@cumbriacc.gov.uk

If you have any questions or queries about specific county council services, please contact your county council or our Community Unit team in your area.

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