



Cabinet – 15th January 2014

**Comments from the Liberal Democrat Group
Provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 – 2017/18**

The Liberal Democrat Group would like to congratulate the officers in putting together a very difficult MTFS. The Council's budget continues to be squeezed and with each year the scope to manage this through efficiency savings diminishes.

Nevertheless, the officers have managed to find ways to achieve efficiencies through more effective ways of working, such as their e-auctions system for procurement and commissioning, and through an improved placement system for vulnerable children.

We acknowledge that it is not possible to achieve the necessary savings through efficiency measures alone. Some service reductions are inevitable to achieve a balanced budget and there are no easy decisions to be made, but we would like to express our concerns over the following items:

1) Phasing out subsidies to the Community Meals service.

Some of our most vulnerable residents rely on this service as they are incapable of organising their own meals. If the price is doubled then there's a risk that they may end up going without.

If funding is removed we need to put in place a different mechanism to ensure that these people get a good meal each day.

2) Phasing out Green Waste Recycling Credits

This could be a false economy if it led to people putting green waste in their rubbish bins. The County Council could end up paying even more to dispose of it that way, especially with the extra Landfill Tax.

Leicestershire has one of the best recycling rates in the Country and it would be a shame if this was put at risk.

3) Reducing Street Lighting by a further £1m, in addition to existing savings proposed in previous MTFS'.

There have already been substantial cuts to the Street Lighting budget, with 'dimmed lights' in a number of areas and part-time night lighting in others.

We understand that further reductions could mean some places being left in the dark altogether. This would be an extreme step which could have unknown implications for community safety.



4) Reducing the Early Help £2.1 million.

Our Early Help services are designed to catch and address problems at an early stage. Cutting this important service may turn out to be a false economy if it leads us to having to deal with larger problems down the line.

5) Reductions in Environmental Maintenance

Whilst this may reflect the outcome of the consultation process, we believe it will give rise to complaints and concerns and we think there is an alternative way to deliver some savings in this area.

We would like the possibility of devolving responsibility to district or parish councils to be fully explored, giving more local control over the level of service in their area.

Finally, we notice that the current draft includes a 1.5% Council Tax rise. Rather than increase the Council Tax on Leicestershire residents, we believe that the Council should accept the Coalition Government's offer for a grant of £2.4 million per year in exchange for freezing the Council Tax.

We look forward to scrutinising the provisional MTFS in further detail over the coming weeks and hope to see an improved version at next month's cabinet.