

MILTON Keynes Council has been slicing and dicing its budgets for years in order to save money and now there is very little left to cut. It says that in the past six years its funding has been cut by £38 million, the increased demand on services in that time has cost £73 million and thus the council has had to find £111 million of savings. The current budget is £175 million with, it is claimed, a further £49 million of savings required over the next four years.

Now the council could raise its council tax but the problem for it is that council tax increases are capped. Central government dictates that if a proposed increase is more than two per cent, the council has to hold a referendum. This is extremely costly and, because turkeys are unlikely to vote for Christmas, it would probably produce, for them, the 'wrong' result.

One area in which it could make some further cuts is on non-statutory services; those services such as grass cutting, infrastructure maintenance and refuse and recycling collections which are, unbelievably, purely discretionary. Thus

around the country we have already seen similarly 'strapped' councils cutting refuse collection to once a fortnight or even once a month. And heaven help you if you miss that.

If that were to happen here it would certainly give residents cause to wonder just what they do get for their oh-so-expensive council tax.

However, someone at the council has come up with what they must have thought was a wizard idea. They would approach the 48 parish and town councils in the borough and offer them more power - oh, and more responsibility. The idea was to devolve the cost of non-

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## Defiant parishes refuse to pick up the tab

statutory services to the parish and town councils whose precepts are at present not capped. You will find your local parish or town council precept listed on your council tax bill as a separate item - each varies. But it is still a tax.

The fly in this ill-thought-out ointment is that government is now consulting (*September 2016; Department for Communities and Local Government: The 2017/18 Local Government Finance Settlement Technical Consultation Paper - Pages 13/14*) on a proposal to cap parish and town council precepts too. If their precept is increased by more than 2pc it looks very likely that they

would also have to hold a referendum.

In the meantime, however, a parish precept increase of £75 per annum per band D household, to cover services to be no longer provided by Milton Keynes Council, had been suggested by a senior officer in informal meetings with selected parish and town councils. However, this was later angrily denied by a council cabinet member.

Despite this denial, at the recent Parishes' Forum some parishes were reported by attendees to be incandescent about the way proposals suggesting parishes pay for services had allegedly been proposed by Milton Keynes

Council. In response, the MK Association of Local Councils has said it is arranging a conference in March next year to discuss the whole issue of services and funding.

Since the Parishes' Forum debacle, it has now been suggested that no services will be put up for consideration to be taken over by parish and town councils in this budget round. I am told that Milton Keynes Council now understands that the parishes are arranging their conference in the New Year and that the council's 'shopping list' should be prepared by then, hence there being nothing formally on the table at the moment.

To these eyes, it seems the borough council has done a major U-turn on outsourcing service funding which was being proposed for the financial year 2016/17 and has backed down for the foreseeable future. At least this will give them a little more time to work out a proper solution to their financial black hole.

In the meantime refuse to let the refuse pile up. Cheerio.

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**Hurry, you only have until the 23rd November to submit your entry.**

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## Nursery proves it is top of the class

Angels Day Nursery of London Road, Kettering has retained its 'Outstanding' rating with Ofsted, thanks to its high calibre of staff and management team.

Simeon Singer and his partner Miriam Herman took over Angels Day Nursery and pre-school in December last year and began to create a new interactive, parent-friendly website.

They also worked with a leading outdoor landscaping company to develop two imaginative outdoor play spaces, the second of which is due to be completed this month. The living space above the nursery is also being offered to community groups as a meeting space.

This was the third consecutive 'Outstanding' rating by Ofsted but the first inspection to take place under the new, stricter rules announced by the government last summer.

Ofsted praised the nursery management and staff as being "totally dedicated to providing high-quality care and education for all children who attend" and "very positive role models". The inspector also noted that the "children settle very quickly and receive exceptionally warm and nurturing care (which) enables them to flourish".

Mr Singer said: "We are delighted to have been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and are very proud of our facilities and team which includes excellent nursery nurses, a talented chef and special educational needs coordinators. This enables us to provide a 'home from home' environment and ensure that each day is full of activities tailored to meeting individual needs."

**Angels Day Nursery, which caters for children up to the age of four, is offering parents guided show rounds of the facilities. To find out more or to book an appointment, visit [www.angels-nursery.co.uk](http://www.angels-nursery.co.uk) or call 01536 519926.**



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