

Councillor Hargreaves – Portfolio Holder for Finance

Council – 8 December 2020

All Party Parliamentary Working Group for District Councils

I recently attended a meeting of this group. There were about 70 MPs and councillors 'present'. The topic was district council finances. Several councils were reporting significant shortfalls from covid, which UDC has been able to cover from our commercial investments. However it was interesting that a councillor from South Cambridgeshire noted they were also doing commercial investments to fill in for lack of general funding.

Unhelpfully the government has been trying to stop councils doing this, but in their consultation paper they failed to ask why councils were doing it, or offer any substitute. I put to the group that rather than telling us off it would be more helpful for the government to issue guidance. The government's approach was characterised by the South Cambs councillor as punishing the many for the sins of a few.

Being a parliamentary group, I sent a friendly invitation to our MP to join me. I got no response. I also note that the majority of MPs had their cameras off and took no part. Neither the chair nor anyone else commented on this or on whether they were really attending at all. However, Zoom is a great benefit as I would not have taken a day out to go to Westminster, and allowed cost and time effective participation.

UDC grants to voluntary bodies

Cllrs Lees, Lodge and myself are the working group which allocates UDC funds to voluntary bodies. The total for this year is £330,000, and the total giving by the council including this and the various community grants and the Members Ward Initiative is £610,750

Here is the Voluntary Bodies allocation:

Voluntary body	Allocation 2020/21
Accuro (Care Services)	10,000
Action for Family Carers	15,400
Carers FIRST	6,000
Citizens Advice East Herts	11,500
Community360	6,000
Council for Voluntary Services	34,000
Hearing Help	2,000
Home-Start Essex	10,500
Saffron Hall Trust	1,000
St Clare West Essex Hospice Care Trust	3,000

Support4Sight	12,000
Uttlesford Buffy Bus Association	5,000
Uttlesford Citizen Advice	160,000
Uttlesford Community Travel	40,000
Volunteer Uttlesford	13,600
Grand Total	330,000

Last month we reviewed, with officers, half-year reports from the recipients. The groups had worked hard to modify their support channels for covid. Some had not suffered much financially as mostly grant funded and not charging anything to those they help. Other such as Community Travel have funded PPE and vehicle modifications, and at the same time lost revenue from reduced riders. Others will have lost fund raising events.

The original intention was the funding allocations should be for two years, but we decided as circumstances, including financial, have changed, new applications and a reassessment will be invited for next year. The two year model also excludes new applicants, which we considered unreasonable.

Just to feature one group; Action for Family Carers, which supports young people who care for their parents or other relatives. Here is a cut from their website:

‘Our Young Carer Lead Tracey has been keeping in touch with Young Carers in Uttlesford by telephone and Facebook. Some of them are confused about their future plans – whether they will still be going to college, etc., and we are helping by explaining the latest government advice and guidelines.

They have been talking about how lockdown has affected them and their families. Many of them have said that they miss seeing their friends and being able to go out and about. They are all looking forward to starting club again, which we have discussed with them. They know that we are working to find ways in which we can do this that will work for them too.

Tracey will continue to stay in touch with the young people and they know they are more than welcome to call her anytime they want to talk or have support. Call Tracey on 07702 858650 or email her at tracey.hartley@affc.org.uk.

Thanks to Uttlesford District Council for enabling the support for Young Carers in their district.’

A comment in their report was that some young carers during lock-down had been doing home schooling for their younger siblings

Neil Hargreaves