

NORFOLK

Cuts 'disastrous for disabled'

Feared budget cuts would make disabled people feel socially excluded, make work and travel difficult – and would end up costing more, according to a new report by Norfolk's Coalition of Disabled People (NCODP).

Representatives from the coalition released the report and a DVD yesterday which looked at the impact of national budget cuts and tax changes, and at the additional cuts from cash-strapped local councils.

The report for NCODP, by Dr Chris Edwards, economist and Senior Fellow of the School of International Development at the University of East Anglia, has been submitted to the Big Conversation consultation by Norfolk County Council.

Of Norfolk County Council's proposed £136m cuts in services over the next three years, £45m will have a direct impact on disabled people.

The increase in VAT is expected to add £158 to bills in an average household which means around 100,000 disabled people in Norfolk will see their standard of living decline by a third. And 45,000 people of working age will lose more than £500 a year because of changes to their disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA), according to the report.

Mark Harrison, chief executive of NCODP, said: "The cuts discriminate against disabled people who are experiencing double discrimination – cuts in benefits and regressive tax changes from central government and devastation of local services if Norfolk County Council implements its proposals in the Big Conversation. They will cut access to work and housing benefit. They are discriminatory and disproportionate."

Kathy Saunders, chairman of NCODP said: "The proposed cuts would be disastrous for disabled people for many years to come. It will put them at a social disadvantage and the total impact has to be assessed. The cuts will cause damage to vulnerable people and families which will be unnecessarily expensive or impossible to repair."

David Harwood, Norfolk County Council's cabinet member for adult social care, said: "We would like to thank everyone who has come forward. We have had a lot of people respond to the Big Conversation. We have heard from about 25,000 individuals and organisations, some of which represent tens of thousands of people."

"We will do the best we can for everyone. We said we will look after the vulnerable and needy and they will be uppermost in our thoughts when we make big decisions."

The report explained alternatives to the budget cuts which included uncapping National Insurance contributions so they are paid at 11pc all the way up the income scale, which would generate £9.1bn and a 50pc tax on gross income above £100,000 a year (it is currently £150,000 or more) which would raise a further £2.3bn.

Dr Chris Edwards, author of the report, said: "There are two problems; the unequal nature of the cuts and the counter productive nature of the cuts. We can do it in different ways – we can tax the rich and we can tax the financial sector."

Polly Vaughan, 27, from Gorleston is married to Kevin, an assistant practitioner and they have two children Francis, six, and Imogen, two.

Mrs Vaughan said: "The cuts would mean far less of a family life to me. I

By LUCY WRIGHT

have assistants who help me get dressed in the mornings, help with the housework and looking after Imogen."

Mrs Vaughan's DLA pays for assistants who help her every day.

"If my DLA was to stop I would be stuck at home. My assistants help me to get out with the children and attend things like a tots group with Imogen," Mrs Vaughan said.

"Losing my activity would be the biggest blow for me. If the cuts go ahead, lives will be put at risk. In the long run it will cost a lot more money and time to put things right."

Penny Parker, 41, from Downham Market, works as a membership and group development coordinator. She is blind and has a guide dog, Betty. She is married to Simon, 48, a design engineer and they have three children Raphael, 20, Arron, 14, and Katie, 13.

Mrs Parker said: "My DLA is my access to work because it pays for my transport and adaptations in the work place. I have a note taker that I use in meetings and it pays for my support worker to drive me to groups for work. DLA was brought in to help people and it recognises the extra costs of living, for instance in my kitchen I have a set of talking scales. Money for adaptations is hard to find. I don't know how we will manage if our DLA is cut. I was scared when I first lost my sight but now I am confident thanks to the support I received."

■ COMMENT: Page 16.

Picture: SIMON FINLAY



MAKING THEIR POINT: Dr Chris Edwards, Kathy Saunders and Mark Harrison launch the Norfolk's Coalition of Disabled People report which looked at the impact of national budget cuts and tax changes.

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OPINION & COMMENT

Eastern Daily Press

No 43,463

Where are the jobs coming from?

Page Five

A Downing Street jobs summit is rather a difficult concept for the prime minister because it is an established part of Conservative philosophy that jobs are created by businesses and not by governments. By this view, the role of government is to create conditions that are conducive to job-creation. But many people – and not just in the political centre or on the left – think its responsibility goes well beyond that and will be quick to blame ministers if the unemployment figures substantially deteriorate.

It was in that knowledge, and amid much speculation that economic growth may be a lot slower in the first half of this year than in the last nine months of 2010, that Mr Cameron met with several captains of business in No 10 yesterday.

With spending cuts going deeper, it will undoubtedly be a very difficult year for jobs in the public sector. The government is hoping that to some considerable extent that will be mitigated by the provision of new, additional jobs in the private sector – on top of the 300,000 posts established there over the past six months.

An announcement by Sainsbury's that it is to create 20,000 jobs across Britain over the coming three years helped Mr Cameron get the headlines he wanted. So did statements by Tesco and Morrisons about 9,000 and 5,700 new posts. So, encouraging prospects in the supermarkets. But who will be making and supplying the additional goods they will be selling?

The government has already cut its economic growth forecast for this year to 2.1pc. That has contributed to Labour's warnings of a "jobless recovery", and chancellor George Osborne is expected to make growth the main theme of his budget on March 23. It will be heavily embarrassing for him and the prime minister if the expansion figure is revised downwards again, and yesterday's summit was part of endeavours to stop that. Will employment rights be watered down to encourage recruitment and growth?

The unions are deeply suspicious.

Hobson's choice

Page 11

Being a county councillor is a pretty thankless task at the best of times. At the moment, it must be a nightmare.

Faced with finding £155m of savings, Norfolk County Council has come up with a package of proposals. And the members will shortly have to decide whether to go along with them – or find other, no doubt equally unpalatable, options.

In effect, they are damned if they do. And they are damned if they do.

The latest group to, quite rightly, highlight the potentially devastating impact of the cuts is Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People (NCDP).

The group's claim that disabled people would be hit directly by £45m of the cuts, and would be socially excluded as a result, is heartbreaking.

But at the same time, councillors are hearing similar stories about children in care, college students and vulnerable youngsters.

Wherever the axe falls, it appears that it will cause significant hardship. The elected members will require the wisdom of Solomon to find the best solution.

Raw deal

Page Three

More is less. At least it is if you want to take advantage of a National Express East Anglia (NEEA) meal deal. The situation that Chris Lees found himself in, when faced with paying more money for a sandwich and a cup of tea than the same sandwich and tea plus a bag of crisps, was bizarre.

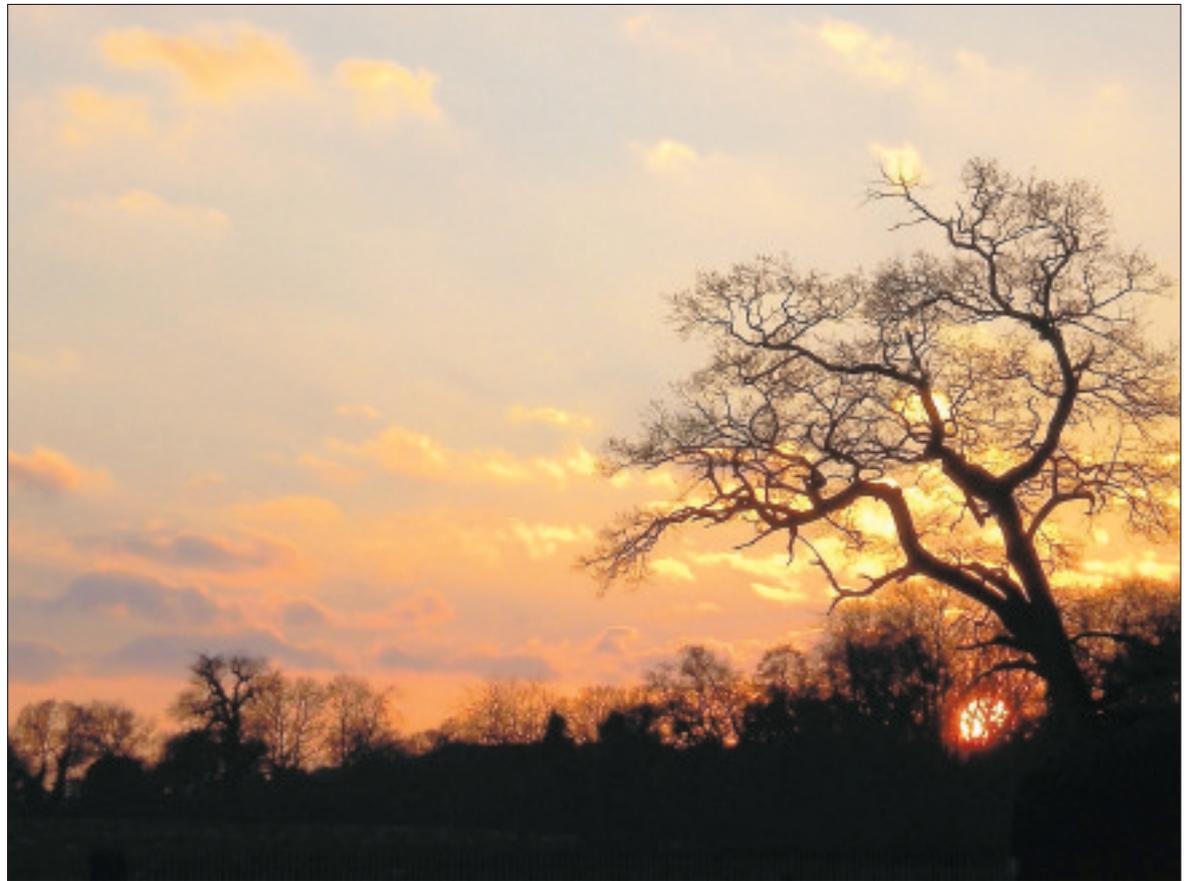
It is, of course, good news for those who are feeling particularly peckish and are not too fussed about whether their snack is healthy. But if you are watching your weight – and your wallet – the deal does not add up. As fares continue to rise, we do not want NEEA to be discouraged from offering decent deals. But perhaps the company could come up with something that rewards healthy eating instead.

BIBLE TEXT

The honest man comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that God is in all he does.

John – 3, 21

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

in association with 

MAUREEN WICKHAM

SUNSET AT BLICKLING: If you would like to submit a picture for this feature, visit our website www.edp24.co.uk and click on the Contact Us tab for details.

I was ill, I mean really ill... this was man flu

It seems quite incredible that we can run out of flu vaccine. We know that each year there will be an outbreak, that for some vulnerable people the outcome can be fatal.

So how do we manage to order too few doses? Beats me.

The government's best answer is to use last year's supply. Presumably the medics wouldn't use it if it wasn't ok.

But if it is still ok, and there's loads left over, why order more this year, why not use up the lot left over first.

This has never been a worry in the past as, like many of the male of the species, I don't do doctors. I only go when nagged by the female of the species.

So succumbing to the ear bashing, anything for a quiet life, I phoned up for a flu jab.

This surgery, the one I've been using for years, is well run, relaxed, really nice docs and nurses, no dragons on the gate.

But these nice people still have the power to cause pain. I mean real pain.

Pain isn't something I do. And I hate needles.

It was the first time I'd undertaken a flu jab, first injection for probably more than 40 years.

But surprisingly there was no pain, I didn't cry. Bit annoyed I didn't get an 'I've been brave at the doctors' sticker or a boiled sweet, but you can't have everything.

Problem was there was a warning. You might, said the nice armed and highly dangerous nurse (she had a syringe in her

RICHARD WATTS



hand) experience mild flu symptoms.

But as I understand it, that's how immunisation works. Give someone a tiny touch of something and they won't get the full-blown dose.

So on waking the following day I quickly realised why there was a soreness at the back of the throat.

Mild headache.

Bones a bit achey.

Altogether yuk.

And this is where the female of the species comes into their own, glorying in their ability to take pain and sickness on the chin and carry on, stiff upper lip and all that.

I mean I was ill, really ill. Could she book a home visit from the doctor? 'Don't be so stupid.'

Cup of tea for the sick? 'Get it yourself you're not ill.'

See what I mean?

If only you women realised how us men

suffer. You have a far higher pain threshold. You have no fear of doctors, or armed and highly dangerous nurses. You seem to breeze through colds when us men have far worse symptoms, we need to take to our beds or at least be parked in front of the telly if there's rugby on, and be fed honey sandwiches and regular cups of tea, no sugar thank-you, can of lager be nice in ten minutes.

I checked the above with a friend at the bar. He'd been really seriously ill, perspiring, sore throat, no appetite and, strangely enough, received a similar reception from his nearest and dearest.

He was even convinced that he was well enough to work, only for his colleagues to tell him he looked awful and what did he think he was doing in the office.

She had consulted a friend and there ensued a conversation about man flu. Ha, they joked, even GPs recognise it now, they'll probably give man flu medical authenticity by putting it in our notes.

Man flu is a serious illness, deliberately misunderstood by the opposing gender to belittle the male of the species.

There's only one thing worse than man flu and that's TWGA, for which there is no jab from an armed and highly dangerous nurse.

Even the female of the species succumb. There is no known cure.

Doctors call it a virus. We know it is 'That's was goin' about.'

Even if a jab was available, we'd probably run out.