

Warnings of County bankruptcy?

13 October 2022



Surrey County Council is calling on the government to delay **social care reforms** which it is claimed could “bankrupt” the authority. Plans for more generous means testing and an £86,000 cap on care costs are due to come in from October 2023, but councillors have raised serious concerns on the impact it could have on finances. Surrey County Council, which was last week called on to use its status as a “top Tory authority” in lobbying government for more funding ahead of winter pressures on the NHS, has voted to call for a delay to the social care changes.

A meeting of full council on Tuesday (October 11) approved a motion to ask for more time to prepare for the roll out of the plans, which could cost the council up to an additional £40million a year.



Cllr Bernie Muir - SCC

Calling adult social care “the key issue of our time” **Councillor Bernie Muir** (Conservative, Epsom West), putting forward the motion, said Surrey was an “outlier”, with nearly two thirds of residents funding their own care. Cllr Muir said many of those would qualify for funding under the new plans, therefore needing a detailed means test and said without government funding the plans “simply would not be financially viable”.

She called the numbers “staggering” and said the timescale was “not practical” because of needing to means test an additional 9,500 to 12,000 people, on top of already “extremely challenging” staffing problems. Cllr Muir said: “With the rapidly ageing population and increase in those who have complex needs, it is clear that we have to find a way to pay for social care needs and these need to change in order to help meet the challenge. Surrey County Council supports the government’s desire to tackle this long term issue. But for Surrey the current proposals would appear to be untenable.”

Seconding the motion, **Riasat Khan** (Conservative, Woking North) said it was estimated that the county council could face a funding gap of between £8-20m in 2023/24, rising to £25-40m in 2024/25. He also said somewhere between 85 to 300 extra trained social workers would be needed “within a very tight timescale”.

Cllr Khan said: “Given that we already have resourcing issues, this will be extremely challenging.” Cllr **Will Forster** (Liberal Democrat, Woking South) said the cumulative cost to the council by 2033 could be as high as £3.2billion, which he said “terrified” him. He said: “That is unsustainable. That would bankrupt this council, resulting in us abolishing all services to keep that bill going.”

The **County Councils Network**, which represents 36 English councils, also called for delays to the reforms, which it otherwise supports. The organisation said they could lead to longer waits for care packages, and would add to “a workforce crisis” being faced by authorities at the moment, with inflation also set to add £3.7bn in additional costs to existing services by 2023.

The motion, carried by members, said the council would continue to work with central government to get money to “fully fund reforms across the decade” and push for a delayed and phased introduction of the reforms. As well as this, the council will continue to develop the new Integrated Care Systems for a more joined up approach to health and social care and continue its commitment of tackling health inequalities across the county.