



The Rt. Hon. Gregg Clark MP  
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(By email)

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Date 9th March 2016

My Ref: BS.16/17 ST1

Your Ref

Dear Mr Clark

I write to you in the capacity of Chair of the Co-operative Scrutiny Board at Plymouth City Council. The role of the Board is to act as a critical friend to the council executive and to reflect the voice of the people through the scrutiny process. Each year the Board undertakes a wide ranging scrutiny of the City Council's draft budget, held over two to three days in January, which is made available to the general public via a webcast.

The work of the Board and undoubtedly the work of the executive and officers is hindered by the painfully slow release of information from Whitehall on the Local Government Finance settlement, the impact of which is to prevent local authorities from being able to carefully consider the impact of further reductions in budgets in a timely manner.

The key decision for tax payers in Plymouth is whether the council tax charge will be increased. The Local Authority has always set out to be open and transparent with this decision, as early as possible. This year has been particularly difficult, the lack of detailed information regarding the proposed 2% Adult Social Care precept, and extremely late confirmation of the withdrawal of the council tax freeze grant for 2016/17 have not only impacted upon our budget but has also removed the prospect of any meaningful engagement with the general public.

Any major initiatives which are planned, such as the 2% adult social care levy, should be shared with local government well in advance, alongside early confirmation that the indicative settlement figures will not be reduced. This will allow local authorities to make measured and informed decisions, and most importantly to engage with the people of the city.

The Board urgently requests that you reconsider the process for the announcement of the final settlement in order for councillors to have time to consult with local people on how to deal with cuts from central government to our core funding.

Yours Sincerely

Councillor David James, Chair, Co-operative Scrutiny Board.

CC.  
Oliver Colvile MP;  
Gary Streeter MP;  
Cllr Tudor Evans, Leader, Plymouth City Council