

# Taxpayers to foot bill as basic allowance rises 18.5 per cent

## Shock as councillors vote to up their own expenses

TAXPAYERS will foot a £325,937 bill after councillors at North Herts District Council voted to increase their own expenses.

But Royston councillors either abstained or voted against the motion that received support from a Conservative majority at the full council meeting last Thursday.

The changes will take an extra £65,760 from the public purse on the amount included in the draft budget for the year 2011/2012, with the leader's allowance rising by 68 per cent to £12,000, and portfolio holders by 65 per cent to £4,533.

The basic allowance will be £4,500, an increase of 18.5 per cent.

A report by an independent remuneration panel found North Herts councillors to be among the country's lowest paid, with many funding council work out of their own pocket.

However, Cllr Deepak Sangha (Hitchin Bearton), leader of the

### ■ ALICE HUTTON

Labour Co-operative, said it was "a slap in the face" for the county's hard-working constituents at a time when we all need to "tighten our belts".

Council leader Cllr Lynda Needham (Con, Letchworth South West) said that "questions would be asked" about why the council was awarding itself more money when the UK was running a deficit of £180bn, but that whether councillors accepted the new sums would be "100 per cent an individual choice".

She added: "It is not an easy decision; it was very hard. Even with the increase we are still very near the bottom of all similar councils.

"I will not take my rise because I know that for a lot of people it is a very difficult time."

Cllr Rob Inwood (Lib Dem, Palace), who has never claimed expenses, voted against the allowance.

Cllr Fiona Hill (Con, Heath), Cllr Bill Davidson (Con,



**VOTE:** Council leader Cllr Lynda Needham says she will not take her rise. Right, Cllr Rob Inwood voted against the allowance (s)

Meridian), Cllr Tony Hunter (Con, Meridian), Cllr Paul Grimes (Con, Palace) and Cllr Peter Burt (Con, Heath) issued a statement which said: "We felt unable to support an increase in the members' allowances."

Cllr Inwood said: "I just can't believe it. People will be furious."

Former council leader F John Smith, who stood down from the district council earlier this year, added: "The people of North Herts should recognise how much they have been getting their councillors on the cheap so far."

Cllr Steve Jarvis (Lib Dem, Weston and Sandon) was not available for comment.

In total, 24 councillors voted in favour of the increase, 14 voted against it, and six abstained.

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## Grant to help needy families

MORE than 20 vulnerable families are one step closer to getting the support they need following a £750 donation from a county councillor.

Cllr Fiona Hill (Con, Royston) allocated the grant to Home-Start Royston & South Cambridgeshire, a volunteer-run organisation which offers support, friendship and practical help to young families.

The funds will help to recruit and train volunteers and provide outings and activities for families with children with special needs or who have physical or emotional health problems.

Cllr Hill said: "Home-Start Royston offers families an extra pair of hands and the chance to meet other parents in a safe and understanding environment."

A spokeswoman from Home-Start said: "This contribution from Fiona Hill will ensure that we are able to continue to carry out this work and we are very grateful for Fiona's ongoing commitment to Home-Start."

Home-Start Royston and South Cambridgeshire has already raised £3,500 of the £10,000 it needs to set up a special home-visiting support service.

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