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So do we need county council?

Published Date: 22 April 2008

The backtracking over the proposed rise in parking permits prompts at least one important question.

Do we really need county councillors? After all, it was officers who decided the time was ripe to up the prices and if they are capable of taking that kind of decision, why not let them run the whole show?

Making our elected representatives redundant could save the authority a tidy amount in the expenses we pay them.



Most ratepayers will find it extraordinary that officials were responsible, a situation described by Northampton South MP Brian Binley, himself a councillor, as "totally remarkable", which is putting it mildly.

If councillors did not know what was going on, then something is radically wrong with the way Northamptonshire County Council is being run.

How many other decisions are being made by the paid staff? What power they have needs reining in.

The authority has now promised the parking permit charges have been put on hold until members have had the chance to discuss them.

That, of course, does not mean they will be dropped, which they ought to be considering the current economic climate when householders deserve every help in reducing their overheads, however small that might be.

It is not only officials who are becoming too big for their boots.

Councillors in some parts of the country and ministers appear to be overstepping the mark. In Doncaster, for example, the council is asking homeowners for permission to look in their rooms as part of a statistical survey.

Angry residents rightly claim it is an invasion of their privacy and a ploy to increase council tax.

According to a weekend report, the government is targeting half a million people for details about their sex life, earnings and other intimate details.

Already the government and public bodies know far too much about our private lives and this latest move is a step too far.

It is nothing more than a snoopers' charter and a move to increase the power and scope of Big Brother.

If councils want to survey homes, I suggest they concentrate on those they own rather than on private residents.

In Northampton, for example, the way some tenants, fortunately a minority, look after their homes is a disgrace.

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If you take a drive around any part of the town you will see some gardens resemble a rubbish tip, a breeding ground for rats.

If those who live in them allow their gardens to get in this kind of state, the mind boggles at what the interiors are like.

Councils ought to enforce its rules requiring occupiers to keep their homes in good order and if they don't for any good reason, they ought to be evicted.

The problem, however, is that, if they do that, they will probably have to rehouse them.

It's a no-win situation.

The next time the Highway Code is revised, it ought to include a ban on overtaking in built up areas.

Twice in the past couple of days other cars have swerved in front of me while I was doing 30 miles an hour on a busy Northampton road.

The drivers in both cases were in private hire cars, thus dispelling the claim they are the safest on the road.

They certainly ought to be.

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