

Devolution and Budget update - At a meeting of the WSCC Cabinet on Tuesday 3rd February the proposed balanced budget, which includes significant capital investment and increased net investment in key services for communities, was approved. The Cabinet also reaffirmed its commitment to the devolution process, which will see the creation of a new combined authority for the whole of Sussex. The decision was made following confirmation from Government that the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority will be created this May, with the first mayoral election due to take place in May 2028. Once established, powers and funding will be transferred from national government to the local Combined County Authority, who will provide strategic leadership on issues such as economic growth, highways and transport, housing, and public safety.

The new combined authority will bring additional investment into the region whilst also meaning that the authority will have a voice at national level. Sussex delivers huge economic benefit to the country, and the creation of this new combined authority will only strengthen this. The county council will continue to work with East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council on the devolution process, ahead of the anticipated legal creation of the new authority in the spring.

The Cabinet also agreed the next steps for its balanced budget for the year ahead. The proposed budget will now go before Full Council on Friday 20 February for final approval. The county council delivers over **300 essential services**, to around **915,000 residents**, across 769 square miles. The gross amount we spend on delivering these services for our residents is expected to be just over **£2.3bn in 2026/27**. For example:

- £1,346.7m** Managing schools and education, children's social care and support
- £577.2m** Caring for adults and keeping people healthy
- £90.1m** Protecting the environment, recycling and waste disposal
- £84.6m** Maintaining our roads and providing transport
- £83.8m** Running our organisation
- £72.8m** Fire and Rescue services and supporting communities
- £5.8m** Supporting the local economy
- £61.9m** Financing our capital programme and other corporate items

This expenditure includes a gross revenue increase of **£65.1m** to meet increasing demand pressures and costs, particularly in social care, home to school transport, and special educational needs and disabilities. After taking account of grants, fees and charges, and other contributions, our proposed net revenue budget for **2026/27**, is just under **£883m**. The most important aspect of the council's budget for the year is that we have been able to balance it without any cuts to frontline services or a reliance on reserves. This is something that is getting increasingly challenging, as can be seen by the increasing number of local authorities who are turning to government for additional assistance. There is no doubt that, without a massive injection of additional government funding which is very unlikely, the current model of two tier local government is unviable in the long term. This is why it is key to ensure that the upcoming local government reorganisation does deliver on the predicted savings. Far from any additional government funding, under the terms of the governments recent Fair Funding Review, the County Council's funding will actually be reduced by an additional **£30m** over the next 3 years. This is through a new process introduced in the FFR, called Council Tax Equalisation. This where the government effectively takes funding from counties it *perceives* to be reasonably wealthy - mainly shire counties in the south east such as West Sussex — and distributes it to counties it *perceives* to be poorer - mainly in the midlands and the north. Finally, despite finding in-

year savings of around £30m in order to balance our books, we have no choice other than to increase council tax. Our government funding is calculated on the assumption that we will raise our council tax by the full amount. If we don't we will lose even more funding, making balancing our budget almost impossible. Regretfully therefore we are proposing to increase the WSCC share of council tax by **2.99% for core services, plus 2% for ASC, giving a total increase of 4.99%. For 2026/27 this means an increase to the band D tax rate of £7.49 per month.**

The council meeting can be viewed online via a [webcast](#) and you can read more about the budget setting process at www.westsussex.gov.uk/budget . Also, you can learn more about devolution and the creation of the new strategic combined authority at www.westsussex.gov.uk/campaigns/future-of-local-government-in-sussex.

Highways Update - The West Sussex County Council Highways team have been working hard to respond to issues on the county's road network that have occurred as a result of the recent extreme weather including flooding, fallen trees and potholes.

This winter has seen a return to freezing temperatures and heavy rain with recent storms causing significant disruption across the county's roads. Since September we have experienced above average rainfall levels, with January providing double the monthly average in some areas of the county. During storm events our teams are deployed around the clock to manage safety risks and keep the roads clear and moving. The most recent storm brought 81 emergency callouts with incidents ranging from fallen trees and debris hazards to damaged infrastructure and impassable routes. 31 of these callouts were directly related to flooding.

When we receive reports of significant flooding, our teams work hard to assess and manage risks at each affected site. Our safety response service and reactive drainage jetting crews will clear flooding where they are able to do so. If there are underlying issues that need to be investigated, we prioritise key roads that are being impacted or where there is an immediate risk to property. We also have proactive crews who are focussed on checking for drainage grid obstructions, replacing or resetting damaged drainage grids and clearing channels for water to flow from the carriageway to ditches or water courses to remove flooding. Since the start of April 2025, we have cleared over 75,000 drainage channels as part of our proactive maintenance programme.

It's important to note that when we've had prolonged periods of heavy rain, the sheer volume of water means that no highway drainage can work effectively, as the outlet for highway water is over capacity and the water in our system simply can't go anywhere. There are also some instances where it is not possible for us to clear the flood water as it has been caused by run-off from neighbouring land or overflow from flooded water courses such as rivers. Where it is safe to do so, roads will be kept open with appropriate flood warning signage in place. However, where there is a risk to safety, full closures will be put in place with signposted diversions. Residents are urged to:

- Avoid driving through floodwater
- Report significant hazards via the usual emergency channels
- Follow updates issued through official communication channels

Flooding isn't the only issue being caused by the weather. The pro-longed period of cold then wet weather has meant we are seeing a spike in the number of potholes on the network. So far in January we have logged 3,725 pothole repair jobs with our contractor. This is around 1,000 more than this time in 2025, when we had a mild winter, but is still significantly less than the previous two years. January 2023 saw us raise over 7,000 pothole repair jobs with our contractor. We repair potholes based on their severity. Our target for the least severe defects is to complete repairs within 28 days, however we

always work to deliver them sooner where possible. For example, in December these repairs were completed in an average of just 12 days. This month we have increased the number of crews we have operating to respond to the uptick in defects. We are also running 'twilight crews' to extend the working day and have crews working on Saturdays to keep on top of the work. Despite the increased volume of work in January, this additional resource means we are still completing these repairs in an average of 15 days.

Councillor Joy Dennis, cabinet member for Highways and Transport said: "We appreciate that disruption on the roads is never welcome. We are doing all we can to keep the roads open and repair any damage caused by the extreme weather.

"Please bear with us as, although we have crews operating in all weathers, there will be times where we can't rectify every situation straight away. As soon as the weather improves we will be working to resolve all issues caused as well as investigating longer term solutions where needed."

Local Issues:

Blocked Drains - I just wanted to explain why I have asked the PC to please submit their recent flooding reports on the Council's website. There have been a lot of flood of enquiries over the last month or two, many of them coming through councillors. This does mean a lot of extra work for our admin staff, who then have to input those enquiries into our highways reporting system. Members have therefore been asked to remind residents that any highways issue, including flooding, should be reported by residents directly through our website. You will then receive a case reference number and will be updated. This doesn't mean that I won't give you support if needed, I certainly will, but if I subsequently have to raise the issue with highways it makes things a lot quicker if I have that case reference number. The reporting portal can be found at <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/make-an-enquiry-or-report-a-problem-with-a-road-or-pavement/>

Stane Street/ A286 Junction Improvement - I believe your clerk has the official notice that the work will be carried out during April. However, there will be other works taking place along Stane Street over the next couple of months, such as the works to facilitate the new 40mph buffer zone and the bus stops, which will require single lane traffic control. I am told these lights - when in place - will be manually controlled from 06.30 to 09.30 & from 14.30 to 18.30. If I have any more detail I will update the PC on Monday.

Finally, please don't forget to keep an eye on our website, especially our news and campaigns page where you can keep up to date with all our latest news.

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/news-and-campaigns/>

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