

Just a few brief updates this month, following an extensive report last month.

First of all, following my update giving details around our proposed revenue budget of £883m, it was finally approved at full council on 20th February. At the council meeting I am delighted to say that the budget was approved unanimously, with all parties either supporting it or abstaining. A part of that budget is an £850m capital programme, where we are investing in your county, to support you, our residents, and to ensure the future for generations to come.

Just as a reminder, this is a balanced budget, with additional funding for frontline services, including highways - despite the Government taking away £30m of our funding to give to other counties, mainly in the Midlands and the North. We also received an unexpected £2.4m of additional funding in the final local Government Finance Settlement. We have therefore committed that additional money - over and above the extra money we have already committed - to highway maintenance, to try and address the damage that has been done to our highways by this really challenging winter weather, with record rainfall in many areas.

As I said last month, we provide over 300 services across the county, so too many to list here. However, I will just reference some of the services where this County Council is clearly supporting our residents:

- Adult Social care - our service was inspected by the Care Quality Commission last year and we were awarded 'GOOD'.
- Our Children's services are performing really well, with some good OFSTED results from targeted inspections. This includes our 7 children's homes that are all rated by OFSTED as 'good' or 'outstanding'. In fact, one home - which has received three consecutive 'outstanding' OFSTED reports - was recently recognised by The King and Queen, by inviting the senior manager to a reception at Windsor Castle to celebrate the contributions of professional and unpaid carers across the UK.
- Also, our children's teams and individuals, have received no less than six national awards over the last four years.
- We are just about to start a roll-out of replacing all our street lighting with LED technology, thereby not only protecting the climate by reducing our carbon footprint, but also by saving money for the residents by reducing the cost of running these lamps.
- Landfill reduced dramatically from 45% in 2017 to under 2% in 2025 — one of the most significant reductions in the country. Our booking system at the amenity tips has also been a great success and is praised by many people. And fly-tipping in the county is down for the fourth consecutive year — bucking the national trend.
- Finally, West Sussex County Council is very proud of its Library Service. This council has maintained all 36 libraries, when many of our neighbours are having to shut theirs. We have no plans to do that - but maybe others see these precious hubs as a quick win for making savings. Did you know that 70% of our residents live within 30 minutes walk of a library? Last year there were 2.2m visits to our libraries. In fact libraries are much more than a place to borrow books. They are now effectively community hubs - supporting families, providing a digital hub, providing employment and business advice. And, just as an example, to celebrate Wellbeing Month in March, our Library Service are holding special '**Live Well for Longer**' sessions across our main libraries. The date and time for Chichester Library is this **Thursday - 12 March** 10am-2pm. You'll be able to get a health and hearing check, pick up helpful advice from local organisations, get information on future independence and care as you age, and even pick up a new pair of safe, comfy, slip-free slippers (subject to availability). Also in March, some libraries

will be adding new regular activities to the range of free sessions available, such as Tea and a Chat, and Chess.

- As well as special events at the libraries, all year round you can borrow blood pressure monitors to check your heart health at home, reminiscence packs to help with dementia care or to delve into history, and access booklists for information about menopause, bereavement, neurodivergence, and to support your mental health and wellbeing. And of course, there are tens of thousands of books and eBooks to borrow as reading for pleasure is proven to reduce stress and boost your wellbeing. So our libraries provide a vital service to the people of West Sussex and fulfil one of the county council's key aims, which is helping people and communities fulfil their potential.

So, in summing up, and despite what you might read or hear, your County Council - unlike many others - is in very good shape. It is financially sound, and is providing you, the residents, with many excellent services. As we move forward to Local Government Reform it is essential that we continue to protect those services and, to do that successfully, we need continuity with as little disruption as possible.

Local Issues: Chichester City Centre - One key issue that is not so local, but impacts us all, is the state of the pavements in East and North Street. This is an issue that I have been campaigning on for many years, and this campaigning is now coming to fruition. I am delighted to say that our teams at West Sussex - in consultation with both the District and City Councils - have been working on this for the last twelve months - including extensive public consultation - and within the next week to ten days we will be signing off the decision to proceed with the work. There is still a lot of preparation work to do, so you are unlikely to see any results before 2027, but the important thing is that it is at last underway.

Bus Depot - Secondly, I understand that Chichester District Council are still keen on developing the bus depot and parking all the buses on the Avenue De Chartres. Personally, I believe this is a huge mistake. Yes, I accept that the present depot is not somewhere you really want to spend much time. However, I believe Chichester deserves a proper, effective and welcoming transport hub, with buses and trains co-located as they are now. A proper gateway to those arriving in Chichester by public transport. Not a place where buses are randomly parked on a road that is already heavily congested at peak times, making driving around Southgate even worse. This fine City deserves better, and I intend to continue campaigning against these plans. I believe, from both speaking to residents, reading their comments on-line and in the papers, many of you will pick up agree with me.

Food Waste - Just to confirm that when food waste collections start, the waste will not be handled through the Westhampnett site. It will be transported to a collection site in Ford. And just in case you read the misleading article in the Observer recently, CDC were not going to be financially disadvantaged, because I understand that we had already agreed a 'tipping away payment' with them. This means they will be reimbursed for any additional fuel and staffing costs. And just for your interest, the District and Boroughs have received additional government funding to support food waste collection, but the County Council - who will pick up the transfer and disposal costs - have received no additional funding.

Jeremy Hunt – West Sussex County Council Member for Chichester North
c/o Cabinet Office, County Hall, West Street, Chichester, PO19 1RQ
E-mail: jeremy.hunt@westsussex.gov.uk Tel: 0330222419536.