

COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT **TO STROUD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

County finances

As has been well publicised, County Councils across the UK are facing financial challenges. Due to a reduction in the Revenue Support Grant, as well as cost inflation and demand pressures, Hampshire has had to find £140m of annual savings by 2019.

In this context a rise in Council Tax was difficult to avoid. Council Tax rose by 3% from April 2018 whilst a social care levy of a further 3% has also been charged.

It was a difficult decision to raise Council Tax but I believe we have done the right thing. The increase will help to ensure that we can continue to look after vulnerable people who need care, both elderly and young, whilst also preserving local services that are important to residents such as:

- Housewold Waste & Recycling Centres
- School Crossing Patrols
- Community Transport buses

Relative to many other Councils, Hampshire County Council is in a strong position. We are balancing the books. We have good technology which does not just enable us to reduce costs – we also get an income stream by licensing our proprietary software to other Councils.

Hampshire County Council has reserves of over £500m which enables us to make capital investments in improving the County, such as new roads and schools. 92% of pupils are getting their first choice school. And our pupils are still outperforming national averages at GCSEs.

The population of Hampshire is ageing and this is a challenge we have to face. The proportion of the population aged 85 years and over is expected to increase by almost 30%, to 54,600 people by 2023. We await the Government's Green Paper on Adult Social Care with interest.

Highways contract

Following several years of planning, on 1 August 2017 Hampshire County Council moved to a new 7-year highways contract with Skanska. The contract is worth a minimum £30m per year and there is an option to extend it for a further 5 years from 2024-2029. Skanska replaced Amey who had been the contractor for the previous 7 years. The handover was well-handled and everything went smoothly.

Skanska have invested in high-tech new gritting machines and also in new pothole repair vehicles called “Dragons”. We are optimistic that we will see benefits from this new contract in terms of speed and quality of service. Hampshire’s roads are in very good shape compared to other counties but there is always room for improvement!

You can report any potholes or obstructions online at www.hants.gov.uk/roads and I also recommend following @hantshighways for those on Twitter.

South Downs National Park - Brief News

- The 25-Year Environment Plan “A Green Future” which the Prime Minister launched on 11 January 2018 included a commitment to undertake a major review of National Parks along the lines of the Hobhouse report which led to the creation of the first National Parks 70 years ago. This review presents an opportunity for all of us who live in the South Downs. I am looking forward to engaging with the review panel as soon as they are appointed.
- The South Downs Local Plan is currently being revised following the public consultation which ended in November 2017. The Local Plan will then be sent to the Secretary of State on 15 April 2018 who will immediately send it for examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

For Stroud the big issue arising from the Local Plan will be the Housing Allocation for “Land at Ramsdean Road”. Cala Homes are in advanced negotiations over a revised planning application. We will need to keep a close eye on the planning application to make sure three crucial issues are addressed: drainage, adequate footpath access and traffic management along Ramsdean Road.

Russell Oppenheimer
County Councillor, Petersfield Hangers Division