

## Report to Parish Councils

### Councillor Nick Bennett

#### February 2021

In the face of these extraordinary times the **Council Plan** provides the opportunity to reaffirm our key priorities of:

- Driving sustainable economic growth
- Keeping vulnerable people safe
- Helping people help themselves
- Making best use of the resources in the short and long term

The Council has played nothing short of an essential role in the response to the coronavirus pandemic. Officers have worked tirelessly to prevent the spread of the virus, save lives, care for the most vulnerable people and provide emergency support to communities and businesses. This has been achieved with health, community and business partners at the local, regional and national levels drawing upon strong existing partnerships and by building new ones to ensure the best support possible with the collective resources available.

The work has been extensive, for example:

- establishing a completely new service to support Clinically Extremely Vulnerable People to shield
- improving food and fuel security
- supporting delivery of testing provision and now assisting health colleagues with the rollout of vaccinations.
- distributing laptops to the most vulnerable Year 10 pupils to help access online learning. We were the first local authority to make our order to the DfE. and
- working closely with schools to support the re-opening in September.

At the same time as managing the response, we have been firmly focussed on the recovery from the pandemic in the coming year.

We have already developed with our partners a Team East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan. Knowing the particular impact the pandemic has had on opportunities for young people, the plan includes a focus on skills and opportunities for them.

We are already leveraging additional funding into the county to support this; with Team East Sussex Partners we have secured £11.2m from the Getting Building

Fund to deliver eight projects<sup>1</sup> that will create or save at least 480 jobs. We will support the business support hub that offers support to small businesses and in this context grant at least 56% of contracts to local businesses.

Other important work taking place includes:

- Enabling further school-to-school support, and rolling out three Mental Health Support Teams as part of the Government's trailblazer scheme, which will become fully operational in spring 2021 working across 60 schools.
- Continuing to deliver our East Sussex Health and Social Care Plan and our ambitions to deliver greater levels of integrated care, early intervention and prevention to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Delivering a county-wide Environment Strategy and a 2 year action plan to reduce the Council's own emissions to net zero as soon as possible. This builds from a position of having reduced the Council's emissions by over 50% during the last 10 years.
- Delivery of the plan in 2021/22 will include improvement to the energy efficiency of street lighting – our remaining sodium lights will be replaced with LEDs to reduce energy costs and reduce our carbon footprint. and we will bring in further energy efficiency measures for the Council's buildings.
- Facilitating the take up of electric vehicles.
- Our Household waste sites have been operational, with the short exception of closures at the start of first lockdown. We have seen an increase in

## **Revenue budget and Capital Programme**

We present a balanced budget for 2021/22. We plan to spend revenue resources of £868m next year to deliver our priorities, and a Capital Programme which will see £586m invested by 2029/30 into service infrastructure.

Next year we will allocate £92m for a range of capital projects including improvements to broadband, major junction improvements and more walking and cycling opportunities in Eastbourne and South Wealden as well as the next phase of the Eastbourne Town Centre improvements.

Our joint lobbying with MPs and partners has convinced the Government of the pressures we face. The Spending Review 2020 and local government settlement announced additional grant funding, including a £300m Social Care Grant of which we receive £2.5m, and Council Tax flexibilities which has meant that the financial position for next year is not as challenging as in previous years. We have received over £70m

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<sup>1</sup> This will see investments in UTC Maritime & Sustainable Technology Hub (in Newhaven), Sussex Innovation Charleston Access Road (Lewes), Creative Hub Fisher street (Lewes), Restoring the Glory of the Winter Gardens (Eastbourne), Riding Sunbeams Solar Railways (Wealden), Fast Track Business Solutions for the Hastings Manufacturing Sector (Hastings) and the Observer Building (Hastings).

of government grant funding to support the COVID response over the last 10 months, which has largely covered the costs incurred, The additional inputs and spend related to the pandemic have been accounted for separately from our own budgets which have carried on in a 'business as usual' methodology so maintaining our keen focus on reconciling policy , performance and resources.

At their meeting in January, Cabinet colleagues supported a Council Tax increase of 1.99% We are very conscious of the burdens and uncertainties faced by the residents of the county; and, whilst the Government has allowed for a 3% Adult Social Care levy to be applied, due to our prudent financial management we will not need to take the full 3% next year. The budget proposes applying 1.5% in 2021/22 then deferring the remaining 1.5% until 2022/23.

We will do all we can to protect social care services, particularly as the impact of COVID continues to be felt in terms of health, personal finance and education. Children's Services have had to fund additional £5.3m for Looked After Children and Home to School Transport of £500,000. Projected pressures in Adult Social Care require additional funding of over £8m.

The proposed increases in Council Tax and the Adult Social Care Levy will cost a Band D household £1 per week but will help contribute to the longer term sustainability of the services we provide. There has been no need for further savings in addition to those already reported previously in our Medium Term Financial Plan.