**East Sussex County Council May 2024.**

**Budget.**

In 2023/4, the council balanced its budget. There were overspends particularly in Children’s Services but these were offset by more interest from investments and from income generated.

The Council’s budget and Council Plan for 2024/25 were approved at the meeting of Full Council on 6 February 2024. Councillors approved a £538m net revenue budget for 2024/25 with no new cuts to services. The decision not to reduce services was taken despite the rising cost of providing them and funding not keeping pace.

**Revenue Budget 2024/25**

In meeting service pressures and impact of inflation, the Council made additional investments into services of £51.5m, when the 2024/25 budget was set in February this year. Whilst Council Tax (including Adult Social Precept) was increased by 4.99%, the level of additional income required to support the increased investment and set a balanced budget was not sufficient. A £14.3m draw from reserves was required for 2024/25 to set a balanced budget.

The Council’s gross revenue budget for 2024/25 totals over £1bn, as set out below; with 74.3% of all planned expenditure providing Adult Social Care, Public Health and Children’s Services.

The gross budget includes schools but county just pass on to them money from the government. Income from a range of services explains the remaining difference between gross and net budgets.

**2024/25 Capital Programme**

The Council is planning to make capital investments of £837.7m over the next 10 years; with a focus on highways, transport, school places and property maintenance. In contrast to the revenue budget, which is driven mainly by costs in Adult Social Care and Children’s Services, over half of the Capital Programme (56%) is planned to be invested in highways and integrated transport services. The planned investment for 2024/25 is set out below:

**Programme Investment 2024/25 (£96 m):**

**Children’s Services.**

An inspection of the Council’s Children’s Services by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) took place in December 2023. The inspection report published on 6 February 2024, found that the lives of the most vulnerable children in East Sussex are improved by ‘consistently strong and effective’ support. The help, protection and care children and young people are receiving from the Council earned an overall ‘good’ rating, while inspectors found the experiences and progress of children in care to be ‘outstanding'. This report is set against the context of rising demand for Children’s Social Care services and increased complexity of needs. Increases in costs have been particularly acute in looked after children’s care costs, in particular external residential costs (with average costs increasing by 13% between quarters 1 and 2) and support for children with the most complex needs.

**Roads.**

The new contractor, Balfour Beatty, was appointed last May and has since filled 23,000 potholes. The number keeps growing, of course, and it is a battle to keep up with the continuing wet weather. April 2024 was apparently the wettest since 1836.

County has also put £15m more into highways maintenance to do a lot of patching and major repairs. It still isn’t enough ad there are many problem roads locally despite a lot of pressure to try to get some improvements. Some local roads are due for work soon but no point in counting chickens.

**Other services.**

The services highlighted are perhaps the highest profile although the biggest spend is on Adult Social Care.

Nevertheless County does a lot more such as Trading Standards, Registration services, Libraries, Public Health, economic support to name a few.

Roy Galley

May 2024