

Hampshire County Council (HCC)
Meon Valley Division
County Councillor Roger Huxstep's Annual Report 2017-18

County Council's 2017 AGM

Last May, the council welcomed Councillor Graham Burgess as our incoming Chairman. His theme for this municipal year is the armed forces and veterans of Hampshire. Hampshire has the largest number of serving members of the armed forces, as well as veterans. He hoped to raise their profile at every opportunity in what they do and what they have achieved.

Cllr Burgess has been in local government since 1998 when he was elected to Gosport Borough Council to represent Lee on the Solent. He joined HCC in May 2013, representing Lee on the Solent, Grange and Rowner (the Lee electoral division). He served as mayor of Gosport in 2005/2006, he has been deputy leader of Gosport Borough Council since 2009.

Councillor Elaine Still, county councillor for the Loddon division, was appointed vice chairman of HCC. Also, the 4-yearly county election took place. The make-up of the council changed significantly with all 10 UKIP councillors losing their seats. As a result, the Conservative group increased from 45 to 56 members. The Liberal Democrats numbered 19 having gained 2 seats. Labour lost 2 seats and now have 2 members. The Independents went from 2 to 1. Councillor Roy Perry was re-elected as Leader of the Council.

General Election 2017

The county elections gave way to the snap general election, the turbulence of which remains with us to date in the wake of the Brexit referendum. Seventeen of the 19 parliamentary constituencies in Hampshire, including Portsmouth and Southampton returned Conservatives. Of these, one is a secretary of state, 4 are ministers, 2 are chairmen of parliamentary select committees and 1 is parliamentary private secretary to the Prime Minister. Furthermore, Alan Mak, MP for Havant formed the All Party Parliamentary Group for Hampshire to include the Isle of Wight. Its chairman is Ranil Jayawardena MP for North East Hampshire. HCC provides the secretariat for the group. With this parliamentary group and the bevy of Hampshire MPs in government the county council is well placed politically, to lobby on issues affecting our region as well as national interests.

Brexit

Brexit has been prominent in government business and devolution has slipped down the agenda but not forgotten. The county council is still intent on keeping Hampshire together. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government, Sajid Javid has given assurances that no re-organisation of local government in Hampshire would take place without the agreement of HCC.

County Council's 2018/2019 Revenue & Capital Budget.

The councils budget setting for 2018/19 has been a big issue for officers and members to grapple with; given the £140m that had to be saved to balance the budget. Savings proposals in the autumn led the Cabinet to explore further, all viable options to revise the budgeting for

community transport, school crossing patrols and household waste recycling centres. Alternative proposals have been identified and with additional council tax flexibility the savings attached to the above services can be withdrawn and will also allow a £2m reduction in the bus subsidies saving.

The council tax requirement for the County Council for the year beginning 1st April 2018, has been agreed to be £608,175,704.00. This will result in a Band D property's county council tax for the year beginning 1st April 2018 being £1,200.96. This is an increase of 5.99% on this financial year's tax. It comprises the new referendum threshold of 2.99% and 3% which is specifically for adults' social care. You may recall that the council froze council tax at its 2010/11 level for the following 5 financial years but for 2016/17 the government discontinued the council tax freeze grant on the assumption that councils would apply the 1.99% increase they were allowed to do without a referendum. For this financial year, 2017/18, as indicated above an extra 3% was allowed, to be ring-fenced for adult social care costs so the increase then was 4.99%. Had the 2010/11 council tax been raised in line with the RPI, then for 2018/19 level it would now be set at £1295.48, an extra £94.52. If in addition, the 1.99% increase had been applied over the same period, including the extra 5.99% for 2018/19 the Band D tax would have risen to £1352.47, an extra £151.51. So, although there will be an increase in council tax it is well below that which would have been expected with inflation and the council applying the allowed 1.99% rise annually. For the record the proposed tax for all the bands are as follows: Band A £800.64; Band B £934.08; Band C £1,067.52; Band D £1,200.96; Band E £1,467.84; Band F £1,734.72; Band G £2,001.60 and Band H £2,401.92. **Please note** these figures are for the county's precept and are exclusive of WCC's council tax and precepts arising from police, fire services and your own parish precept. These bands were agreed at the recent council's budget setting meeting on Thursday, 22nd February.

So, the budget is not only balanced but is to provide for the increase in demand for our services. To meet the continuing increase in demand for services we need to improve what we do and to utilise capital schemes to help reduce revenue expenditure as far as possible. The increased demand in adult social care means more residents being looked after in their own homes, and in our residences. Recently we have committed another £26million to provide 90 more units for adults with learning disabilities in Basingstoke, New Milton, Aldershot, Eastleigh and Fareham and the first of these comes on stream shortly. The increased demand in children's services, apart from 18,000 more school places, means more looked after children being cared for, and an increase in asylum seekers. Some Children need a safer place, those with severe learning difficulties can find a haven in the purpose-built houses we have made for them. Those who need family intervention will be helped by the increase in children's social workers we are budgeting for - more social workers for children, not fewer. This year it is met by increasing their budget by £9.5 million to allow also for the increased demand for Home-to-School Transport. A one-off amount of £7.6 million was needed for 2017/18.

We have used our Capital programme to increase investment in Libraries, Country Parks, and outdoor centres. Some £17 million thus far has been committed. This will improve the visitor experience and bring in more income, making them self-sustaining instead of a revenue cost.

In the Highways department we now receive over 100,000 enquiries per year. That is ongoing, so we need more, not fewer, electronic methods of dealing with it. And, as housing and population increases, waste disposal is increasing too. This means more household waste and less commercial waste in our energy plants thus reducing the income stream. So, we need to recycle more, and it is important to fund the Household Waste Recycling Centres, not to reduce their capacity. We have revised the PFI financing on our street lighting contract, so that over £1 million per year in savings has been produced for the Highways Department thus reducing the need to find savings in waste recycling centres.

A review of our longer-term future capital needs noted the urgency for a number of schemes to be added to our capital programme. The longer-term requirement is assessed as some £440 million. £218 million for Invest-to-Save Schemes, £133 million for stand-alone schemes and some £55 million for the Schools Programme. The Invest-to-Save Schemes are part of a very clear strategy to produce short stay hubs for Adult Social Care for re-abling clients before they return to their own homes. We shall remodel much of our nursing and residential estate to cater for increasing instances of dementia. The stand-alone schemes involve a number of infrastructure additions, for example an enhanced material's recovery facility. They must be based on a beneficial business case as must each of the Invest-to-Save Schemes and those business cases will be forthcoming in due course.

Our innovative investment in energy saving projects has already saved £29 million and will reduce our targeted carbon levels by nearly 40% now, not in 2025 as we originally envisaged. So, we are setting a new target of 50% by 2025 which we would raise to 55% if it proves feasible to replace all our street lamps with LED lights. And, we are working on that possibility. We are leading the way in providing for electric car charging points. We are ourselves now owners, and we shall save more than £200,000 per year on fuel costs for the investment of an extra £1million in electric cars over diesel. We are investigating Battery Storage technology to reduce further our energy bills as well as help with carbon reductions for a better environment. Although we have taken advantage of the cost benefits of PV we are mindful that the Energy Performance Projects relating to our buildings provide a 7-times better return on investment, so we continue to concentrate on that.

Conclusion

Hampshire County Council at year end still levies one of the lowest council taxes in the country; with a balanced budget, while striving to become ever more efficient and effective at delivering good services.

Cllr Roger Huxstep
Member for Meon Valley Division
Hampshire County Council

12th March 2018