

Chichester Division Councillor report

From Councillor Simon Oakley West Sussex County Council, Chichester East

December 2024

- WSCCs' Fostering Service [Adoption, fostering and kinship care - West Sussex County Council](#) has a film to share the film with your networks: <https://fosteringwestsussex.org.uk/everything-film> . Or, if you want to share one of its specific social media insights about the film, you might like to use this [Facebook](#) post. WSCC will be sending Town/Parish Clerks a fresh batch of posters, flyers and a digital article (for inclusion on websites or in e-newsletters) in January, which will feature an image from the film and a link to the specific page on its website.
- The Government's announcement of its Local Government FY25/6 Funding Settlement is expected during w/c 16th December. Though a number of headline intentions arose from the Autumn Budget Statement, there is considerable (as compared with previous years) uncertainty as to the details. These include:
 - The extent to which the rise in Employers NI and National Living Wage (not only for the Council's direct employees (£6m) but also all of its contractors and external service providers) will be covered by Government; and
 - What WSCC's share of the "3.2% increase in core funding" is to be (and how much of that is expected to come from increased Council Tax), as well as the SEND and Social Care grants.

Government also indicated that it intends to prioritise support for Councils with higher levels of deprivation, which could be an issue for semi-rural Counties such as West Sussex (though it has significant pockets of deprivation) that are not seen by Government in those terms.

The main consequences of the Settlement on WSCC's FY25/6 Budget will hopefully be known by mid-January. It appears Government is assuming Councils such as WSCC will increase their Council Tax by the referendum limit of 4.99%.

- The long-term solution to the national issue of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit is not known, with the existing Statutory accounting over ride expiring in March 2026. The currently expected deficit for WSCC at the end of FY24/5 is about £130m. Overall, the management of this has cost WSCC about £6m in lost investment income.

This deficit is being driven by the increase in children subject to EHCPs. Back in March 2015 there were 3,423 children and young people with EHCPs, and since that time those numbers have risen to 7,900 in March 2024 – an increase of 4,477 (130.8%). The net growth in the number of pupils with an EHCP has continued to grow at a faster rate since the Covid pandemic in 2020. In 2023/24 total volumes of EHCPs that the County Council are financially responsible for increased by 871, increasing significantly from the 2021/22 and 2022/23 increases of 399 and 519 respectively. WSCC has also seen a significant increase in the number of requests for EHCNAs to support the needs of children and young people, particularly after the pandemic. The number of assessments requested in 2023 was 3 times higher than they were in 2018.

In addition, the costs of SEN Home to School transport have increased by £9.810m (67%) over the last four years from £14.649m in 2020/21 to £24.459m in 2023/24.

- WSCC has requested Government provide further information and clarification of its intentions regarding Devolution and Local Government re-organisation. Apparently there are a number of options being considered, many of which could lead to considerable changes in Sussex's and the South East's Local Government arrangements, including Parish Council responsibilities if Unitarisation is involved.
- WSCC has been holding a number of briefings for Parish Councils on Highway related matters, including winter preparedness and, on Monday 16th Dec, drainage/flooding. Copies of presentations are/will be made available to Clerks.
- WSCC is asking for feedback to help shape the West Sussex Road Safety Strategy, which outlines how it intends to improve road safety across the county and reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in traffic collisions. Information about the proposed strategy and how to have your say can be found at yourvoice.westsussex.gov.uk/road-safety-strategy . The survey closes at 11.55pm on 2 February 2025.