

## Report to Chichester City Council March 2026

By Cllr Sarah Sharp, County Councillor for Chichester South

### 1) County Council Elections are now going ahead

The previously postponed local elections will now be going ahead, including those here in West Sussex. This means that County Council elections will take place on Thursday 7 May this year.

When the County submitted its preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) last September they also set out the concerns of holding local elections in 2026 and the effect it would have on delivering the government's objectives for devolution and LGR within their proposed timescale.

Despite some of the way the issue was reported in some areas of the media, the concern is not about the ability to hold elections, but rather recognising that the consequential demands of an electoral process - the build up, the transition to a new set of councillors which happens at every election, induction, the building of new relationships - draw upon the same resources that are being directed towards driving forward the work on Devolution and LGR. The way in which this decision was reached was quite protracted and unclear. It also gave the impression of being the result of pressure exerted by Reform's court case coming home to roost.

### 2) Budget

In the coming year, the county council will spend £2.3 billion on day-to-day services, including:

- £1,346.7m on schools and education, children's social care and support
- £577.2m caring for adults and keeping people healthy
- £90.1m protecting the environment, recycling and waste disposal
- £84.6m maintaining roads and providing transport
- £72.8m on fire and rescue services and supporting communities
- £5.8m supporting the local economy

This includes a net revenue increase of £34.7m to meet increasing demand pressures and costs, particularly in social care, home to school transport, and special educational needs and disabilities.

Alongside the day-to-day revenue budget, the county council also agreed a five-year capital programme of £842m, with capital investments of £142.3m for 2026-27, including:

- £56.5m to maintain roads and provide transport - focusing on the annual highways works programme including investments in major A roads and highways depots, bus services, and street lighting
- £39.3m managing schools and education, children's social care and support – including adaptations in mainstream schools to increase the number of specialist school places within the county and accommodate a wider variety of needs
- £6m for recycling and waste disposal, and to protect the environment - mainly focused on investment into renewable energy, changes needed to waste disposal to accommodate the

collection of separate food waste and other nature-based investments to protect the environment

To balance the budget, savings of £30.4m have been identified alongside the introduction of a 4.99% increase in council tax - comprising 2% for Adults' Social Care and 2.99% for General Fund services.

This means the county council element of the average Band D council tax bill will increase from £1,800.54 to £1,890.36, an increase of £89.82 per year or £1.73 per week.

For advice and guidance on paying your council tax, contact [Council tax payment difficulties - Chichester District Council](#) or phone 01243 534501.

While achieving a balanced budget is a positive milestone, it's not been easy. The Council is navigating significant pressures, including rising costs and a £30m reduction in government funding over the next three years. The redistribution of these funds - Council Tax equalisation giving more funds to poorer areas of the country which do not have the ability to raise council tax - nationally means the County must be even more careful with expenditure.

To meet these challenges, the county council has approved an increase in council tax. It's a difficult but unfortunately necessary decision, as the government expects us to have this additional funding in place when it calculates our overall funding allowance.

### **3) Devolution**

All three constituent councils (WSCC, ESCC, and B&HCC) have now formally consented to the laying of the statutory instrument needed to establish the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority. A statutory instrument is a type of secondary legislation, used to add information or make changes to an existing Act of Parliament.

The Statutory Instrument bringing the Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority (to give it its full name) into being has been laid in Parliament, which means the new authority will be created next month. It already has several officers and has been working on a prosperity strategy as well as working on its structure and how it will be set up and run.

As a reminder, devolution, relates to the creation of a new strategic tier of local government organisations sitting above existing councils and over a wider geographic area. Once LGR happens, the new unitary councils created will replace the current constituent councils as part of the combined authority.

There is a parliamentary process to go through still, however, we expect the new Mayoral Combined Authority to be created this spring.

Although this is described as "devolution" it feels more like "centralisation" in that spatial planning and some transport powers will be pulled up to the higher tier level of the county combined authority and will move away from the lower tiers they currently sit with.

### **4) Fostering**

Our Fostering Service are hosting a series of film screenings, showcasing their latest 2-minute fostering video, The Run, at a number of colleges around the county and they're inviting colleagues to join them.

The film screening aims to raise awareness of fostering and supported lodgings, and to encourage more people to opening their heart and home to a child or young person.

Whether you, or someone you know, has wondered whether you could offer stability and safety to a local child, then these upcoming events are perfect to find out more.

At the events you'll see the new fostering film, learn about the different reasons children end up in care and the role of foster carers, and hear from foster carers about the positive impact they've had on the lives on the children they've cared for (and the positive impact the children have on them).

- **Wednesday 18 March 6-8 pm** – Chichester College

Spaces are limited, so book your free ticket today via [Fostering film screening and networking | Eventbrite](#)

## 5) **Flooding**

Highways officers and subcontractors have been on the receiving end of online and physical abuse while out mending our roads. This is unacceptable and this is the worst possible way to get the flooding sorted as subcontractors will withdraw their services.

The flooding has been extreme and communities must prepare themselves for similar incidents more and more due to climate change.

We also have ageing infrastructure for our key services like water, phone and gas. The need for works on the road in emergencies cause residents to get frustrated unfortunately and yet these incidents are more than likely here to stay. It is unlikely with the level of finances put towards the roads we will always have a 100% functioning network. Last year was relatively dry and so this year has been a shock to residents with the amount of flooding experienced. Speaking to the officers who plan in the streetworks department we are going to focus more on resilience and being able to adapt to emergencies in the future while we need to keep tempers calm.

West Sussex is working on an Action Plan with key stakeholders to resolve the flooding issues long term.

The community is being offered a free event on resilience with officers from WSCC and CDC in attendance on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2-4 pm in the Friends' Meeting House, Priory Road, Chichester: [Select tickets – Building a Resilient Chichester - preparing communities for tomorrow's challenges! – Friends Meeting House](#)

To help plan your journey this is a very useful website to see all the details of current and upcoming road works: <https://one.network/>

## 6) **Hunston Free School Bridleway**

The Church Commissioners have finally replied with the offer of a permissive cycle way but they will not agree to a definitive bridleway. While very disappointing this is at least a reply after at least 9 months.

The plan is to request a meeting with the PROW department, the MP and the Church Commissioners and Cllr Joy Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways.

If there is only an agreement to a permissive cycle way there will be no funding for this as the county will not put public money towards something that could be withdrawn or re-routed with only 6 months' notice.

#### **7) Alcohol reduction campaign**

And finally the stress of reading all this information or being a parish councillor might lead you to drink but there is help at hand – especially for men who might benefit from the one to one help and support.

[Call the Shots on Alcohol - West Sussex County Council](#)

#### **8) The community bus on Stockbridge Road**

Uptake has been steady. The bus was launched in January and the poor weather hasn't been the best for numbers but Community Transport Sussex are currently satisfied with the uptake. We will be monitoring usage and hoping to tie in with a café for a free cuppa or some such offer to entice more usage of the service.