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Report to Parish Councils – January 2024

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in January. For those which did not meet in December I suggest you also see my report sent at the end of November. It is for all 7 parishes in Northern Rother.

Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have been drawn to the attention of parish councillors and others.

Government Funding for Local Government from April 2024

As normal the government announced the level of support for local government on December 18th. As expected, this is for one year only and in summary there is nothing in there which significantly improves ESCC's financial position for the 2024/25. Key points:

- Council Tax – As previously announced, the council tax referendum limit will be 2.99% for local authorities, with social care authorities allowed an additional 2% social care precept. The provisional settlement confirmed that districts will be allowed to apply the higher of the referendum limit or £5.
- Settlement Funding Assessment – The September CPI figure of 6.7% has been applied to increase the local government funding amount within the business rates retention scheme and Revenue Support Grant.
- Local Government Funding Reform – No announcements were made regarding funding reform.

There are a number of changes in specific grants, the most significant is to the Social Care Grant. This has increased in line with December 2023 Policy Statement by £692m to £4,544m. ESCC's share is £45.4m – an increase of £1.3m on previous updates to the 2024/25 budget, due to technical adjustments to the allocation.

Overall, this was not a Christmas present for us and gives us significant budget challenges for the coming year. Our costs have been increasing at a higher rate than our increase in income, particularly due to the increased costs of looking after children in care and social care. I know some have commented that a change in government might solve this, but Labour has made it clear that there is no slack in budgets.

I have previously commented on our budget process which comes to a head in the next few months and will update parishes accordingly.

Funding boost to bolster green skills

Council bosses have welcomed funding that will help boost green skills and support the county's move to net zero. East Sussex County Council's Employability and Skills Team successfully bid for £240,000 from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to launch the Retrofit Skills East Sussex project.

As the project progresses, it is hoped that a range of activities, such as careers campaigns and subsidised training courses, will be offered to support the Retrofit Skills Plan. Updates on the project as it progresses can be found on the council's website.

See <https://news.eastsussex.gov.uk/2023/12/04/funding-boost-to-bolster-green-skills/>

Winter events to take place in East Sussex libraries

A programme of free winter events for both children and adults is taking place in libraries across the festive season and beyond. The events will include author talks, festive crafts and activities, as well as storytelling experiences. On 27 January, Lewes Library and the Lewes Literary Society will host writer, illustrator and cartoonist Chris Riddell in a celebration of the well-loved illustrator Raymond Briggs.

Events are free, but booking may be required. For more information on the upcoming events, visit <https://news.eastsussex.gov.uk/2023/12/06/winter-events-in-east-sussex-libraries/>.