

Reports from Cllr Standley and Cllr Dixon for Hadlow Down PC meeting 10th January 2023

1. Update from Cllr Standley to Hadlow Down Parish Council January 2023

Happy New Year!

Budget

The Local Government financial settlement was announced just before Christmas and was broadly in line with our expectations.

The govt calculation is that local government core spending power would increase by 9.2%. This assumes that the County Council will agree to an increase of 5% in council tax. This is 2.99% for the general fund and an additional social services precept of 2%.

The announcement in the budget of an extra £1bn for the Household support Fund.

Whilst inflation is expected to fall significantly over the year there will be continued pressure on ESCC budget given as I have often stated that 2/3 goes on Adult Social Care and Children's services. Given the demographics of the county now and looking ahead the cost pressures are unlikely to reduce.

It is expected that the budget setting in February will see a balance budget for 23/24 but a more challenging 24/25 and 25/26. These predictions will be much influenced by future reforms to adult social care funding, much discussed over any years but no solution found.

Highways

I am sure it has not gone unnoticed by HDPC that it has been a challenging time for highways. I think it is important to separate the points raised by HDPC re failed repairs from the more immediate short term problems caused by the weather.

The wet November followed by snow and ice followed by more rain has caused considerable damage.

It's only ESCC everywhere is no problem

I sometime hear the above stated but having travelled recently on Kent and Surrey roads there are facing the same challenge. You may have seen the recent programme on SE news which featured problems across Kent.

Potholes

We have some 2,400 defects reported in the system for attention, approximately 1,800 are potholes which is about 1,000 above normal operating levels. We have increased resources to 150% as well as working extended hours and weekends and will keep these resources at this level in review over the coming weeks.

Drainage/Flooding

The second highest category of reports / defects is for drainage and flooding problems. Again we have additional resources covering 24 hours a day.

Gritting

We have 1,500 tonnes of salt on order and awaiting delivery, and are continuing to refill grit bins.

Customer Contact

We have had almost twice the number of customer contacts during December (around 8,000) compared to previous years (4,500) but have a full complement of customer service agents who are working overtime and weekends to process them. The Highway Stewards are also working overtime to help inspect and process cases as quickly as possible as well as undertake their statutory inspections.

2. Update from Cllr Dixon to Hadlow Down Parish Council January 2023

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Local Plan

As discussed at the parish cluster meeting, the draft local plan will not be consulted on before the election. This was always going to be a tight deadline, given purdah, so it is not unsurprising, given the changes in national policy.

The good news is that the government have announced that there will be changes to national planning policy and a revised NPPF has been issued for consultation, just before Christmas. The consultation runs until March 2.

Although the government's standard method for calculating housing numbers remains in place at present, there are many reasons why an LPA might not be able to deliver that number, which are now being clearly stated. Wealden can demonstrate that they have many constraints and therefore it will be likely that we would need to deliver a much lower housing number through the plan.

This will however require some time for the policy team to work on to produce a revised plan based on new numbers and it was necessary to wait for the actual details from the government.

Council Tax

The Council is proposing to increase its share of the council tax next year by 3%, and will be consulting on that number before a final decision is made. The proposed increase for staff salaries is also 3% for next year.

Community Lottery

Wealden is launching a lottery intended to benefit local organisations. There is a launch event on 1st February in Hailsham to which local organisations are invited. For more information, please contact communitygrants@wealden.gov.uk