

Report from County and District Councillor John Barnes – 7th March 2019

Report from County Council

Main news is that overall Council Tax payers will face a 4% rise, including ESCC 2.99%. Fire is up 2.94%. Rother by £5. Thanks to Government one-offs after exceptionally hard lobbying of ministers and successful visits by Liz Truss and Matt Hancock, we had to cut only £5 million rather than the £17 million anticipated at the beginning of the budgetary process. Identifying the core offer seems to have concentrated Whitehall minds, but if we do not get at least a repeat of the one offs we will be facing £18 million cuts next financial year.

There are of course the comprehensive spending review, the fairer funding review and hopefully the long-awaited Green paper on funding the care of the elderly to come later in the year, so we may yet get a more favourable settlement as we have put across our particular demographic.

The Business rates pilot is leaving all concerned with higher resources which is a help and we are experimenting with efficiencies to be gained from AI. We will be spending £375 million this year and the budget is under tight control. We are well pleased with the successful integration of social and health care, which was given particular praise in the Secretary of State's recent visit. We have not only reduced unnecessary hospital admissions, but over 91 per cent of those who return home from hospital are not having to be readmitted over subsequent weeks. In other words those dubbed by the NHS 'frequent flyers' are much reduced in number.

26 miles of carriageway resurfaced, although in my view quality of work is a bit variable. 110 new jobs directly created and wage levels up across the local economy rather more than in rest of SE. Continuing to regenerate the economy and Newhaven port road given the go ahead.

Children's services amongst the very best in the country. So we are getting value for the tax you pay, but we no longer have any general Government grant and so Council Tax, Business rates and Charges carry the whole burden of funding services.

Report from District Council

As far as Rother is concerned CPE is moving ahead, also the core strategy is being revised and hopefully will strengthen policies in relation to protecting the High Weald. We do need more houses but they must be sited sensitively and be of good design.

The new homelessness strategy is being adopted and Rother has started work on more detailed plans which will include buying about 20 houses this year and either creating a housing company or subscribing to Wealden's.