



1. **Organisation:** Despite unprecedented inflationary pressures and ongoing central government funding challenges the Council has successfully set a balanced budget for the 2023/24 financial year. The Council continues to review its processes to ensure it remains as efficient as possible and delivers value for money for our residents, with a council tax increase of just 2.7%, which equates to an additional 10 pence per week. The Council understands that there are still some challenging years ahead of us and we are working hard on savings plans and proposals to help to ensure that our medium-term financial position is sustainable and does not rely on using our reserves to plug budget gaps. Our Financial Sustainability Programme is a key element of this, and its successful delivery will help to ensure that Rother District Council can continue to balance its books in the years to come. Our Medium-term Financial Strategy can be found here [Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-24 to 2027-28.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#), the latest budget report can be found here [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 06/02/2023 18:30 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) and our financial accounts are available are [Budgets and accounts – Rother District Council](#).
2. **Levelling Up Fund:** We received a government grant of over £19m to transform the iconic De la Warr Pavilion and pay towards the Heart of Sidley's development of a new community hub at Sidley Recreation Ground. (Sidley is one of the 10% most deprived communities in England). Bexhill was the only Sussex town to benefit from this round of funding. The projects will support regeneration, create new jobs and boost skills and career opportunities for residents. This partnership bid was successful due to the hard work and dedication of our staff, Heart of Sidley and the de la Warr Pavilion. The Levelling Up funding announcement came just after an £85,000 Levelling Up Parks Fund grant to help Sidley House open space and play area.
3. **Election Year in 2023** We will be doing our best to communicate to local voters about the new requirement to bring photo ID in order to vote at polling stations in May. [Voter ID | Electoral Commission](#)
4. **Business Alerts** In 2022 we launched our new e-bulletin emails for local businesses that is also available on our website. It includes grant opportunities, legislation changes, network and trade events and other useful information. If you know any local businesses who might benefit, please point them to [Business Alerts – Rother District Council](#)
5. **Waste and Recycling** In Rother the most efficient way to increase household waste going to recycling has proven to be kerbside collection. Our recycling bring points have experienced high levels of contamination that force us to collect it as refuse and ruins the efforts of other residents trying to recycle. This is despite using officer monitoring, CCTV, posters, banners, social media and other efforts to tackle contamination. We've been obliged to close the worst sites. So far in 2022/23, we've been forced to close sites at Peasmarch, Burwash and Ravenside (Bexhill). Instead, we've concentrated on improving the kerbside collection, including the collection of small electrical items.
6. **Environment Strategy:**
 - a. We have completed around 30 projects so far and have more in progress.
 - b. The Village Halls Energy Project was awarded £500,000 from the Climate Emergency Bonus Fund in June 2022. In January 2023 Laser Energy were secured as provider for the energy assessments at each site in order to provide bespoke carbon Net Zero plans by April 2023. 36 village halls and community centres across Rother have confirmed participation in the project.
 - c. Eco tips are included weekly in My Alerts emails, where the progress of carbon reduction projects are also reported. We launched a set of Christmas eco tips from gifting, food waste and making environmentally friendly choices.
 - d. Our project on putting electric vehicle charging points into council car parks progresses. Feasibility studies for all nine car parks are completed and we made a grant funding application to the Energy Saving Trust. While some sites have proven complicated, we still anticipate charging points will be operational in 2023.
 - e. Our project to de-carbonise Rye Leisure Centre and Pool is exploring a range of energy saving options, including solar panels, to reduce operation costs and improve the facility's long-term viability.

- f. Our project to de-carbonise our waste collection fleet proposes using hydrotreated vegetable oil instead of diesel was considered by Cabinet in February 2023 and we are working towards implementation in the 2024/25 financial year.
- g. We are working with two other district councils on a funding application for off-gas, low income housing. There's more on housing in the next section.
- h. We will be revising our Environment Strategy in 2023 along with a new action plan.

7. Housing:

- a. Between April and December 2022, 80 new affordable homes were built and available for occupation in Rother. That figure will increase to over 100 new affordable homes by March 2023. In 2021/22 there were 112 new affordable homes.
- b. Post pandemic and influenced by the financial crisis, we continue to record ever rising demand on our housing service. In December 2021, 2,095 households were on the council's housing list. This is an increase of 180 households since March 2022, which means on average 20 households a month are accepted on to the list.
- c. Along with a rise in households applying for housing there is a rise in households that need to be placed in temporary accommodation. By December 2022 we had 133 households living in temporary accommodation.
- d. House building has picked up post-pandemic. In 2020/21 there were 153 new homes (net) in Rother. In 2021/22 we gained 238 new homes in the district. So far, from April to December a further 222 have been built already (net and pending end of year final revisions).
- e. Between April and December our housing staff helped 90 households from being homeless or close to homelessness.
- f. Blackfriars in Battle is a housing initiative led by Rother Districts Council's housing company. It will provide 200 new homes. Construction started in 2022 for site clearance, roads and drainage and continues in 2023. Monthly updates are available on our website.
- g. The council's review of the Local Plan, which is required every five years, is planned to continue up to December 2023. Parishes were consulted in 2022 and the public consultation will be held after the local elections in the summer of 2023.

8. Community Grants:

- a. The Rother Community Lottery, launched In April 2022, has been hugely successful. With 60p of every £1 lottery ticket going towards funding 75 local good causes.
- b. The council awarded £65,000 in community grants to local groups and organisations in the first round of funding in September 2022.
- c. Grants went to Fairlight Parish Council and Brede Parish Council to improve their respective playgrounds. Grants went to Northiam Village Hall towards creating a new, accessible meeting room and to Winchelsea Beach Community Association for an extension to their Community Hall. Rye Harbour Sailability had a grant towards an adaptability dinghy for people with disabilities.
- d. Decisions on the second round took place at Cabinet in March 2023. Battle Action Plan received funds for junior park run, Burwash Playing Field Association received a grant to redesign the playgrounds at Swan Meadow playing Field. And grants went to Icklesham Parish Council for outdoor gym equipment and Staplecross Club for inclusive toilet and baby changing facility.
- e. £10,000 was also agreed from the Community Grants to support events celebrating the King's Coronation in May.
- f. A new Reduce, Reuse and Recycle grant scheme opens 1 April 2023. This scheme offers small grants up to £1,000 and up to 50% of project costs for a wide range of projects that will promote reducing, reusing or recycling.