



Councillor Paul Redstone

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County Councillor Report for Annual Parish Meetings

This report is written for the Annual Parish Meetings for residents of Northern Rother Division, comprising the parishes of Northiam, Beckley, Peasmarsh, Rye Foreign, Ewhurst, Bodiam and Salehurst & Robertsbridge.

I always issue a monthly report for parish council meetings. This report is more strategic covering a review of the year and some hot topics. I am happy to answer questions at Annual Parish Meetings, at parish meetings or elsewhere.

One parish produces a printed document which includes this report and which is finalised before the county council election on May 7th. Others have annual parish meetings before the election. On May 8th one of the following outcomes will be true. In either case I have been very pleased to have served the parishes over the last 5 years.

- I am delighted to have been re-elected as your county councillor and look forward to serving you for at least the next year, until replaced by two unitary councillors
- I am sorry that I was not re-elected and wish my successor well in serving the residents and parish councils of Northern Rother. I will ensure that any outstanding cases are handed over

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

As I reported last year in December 2024 the government issued a White Paper on local government reorganisation with two main changes:

- Local Government Reorganisation, which will see the district, borough and county councils in East Sussex abolished and replaced by a one unitary council or possible two new unitary councils, with similar changes in West Sussex.
- The addition of a directly elected mayor covering the unitary councils in Sussex (East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove)

This is being imposed on all county councils but there were advantages, notably extra funding, in being in the 'Devolution Priority Programme'. East Sussex applied for this and was one of 6 granted priority.

During the last year most councils (district, borough and county) worked together to submit a document called 'One East Sussex' which proposed that a single East Sussex unitary council with the same footprint as the county council would be the preferred option. This offered more

savings and a lower risk in terms of reorganisation.

Brighton and Hove City Council proposed an alternative which split most of East Sussex into two unitary councils though with some areas of the coastal strip such as Seaford and Peacehaven moving to Brighton. This would be much more radical and would not meet the criteria set out in the White Paper. A survey indicated that it was very unpopular with residents of the coastal strip.

The decision on which option will be adopted is up to the government and was expected to be announced in the near future. However in late March the government announced that the government is deferring the decision and seems minded to go for One East Sussex but with some areas of the coastal strip being moved from East Sussex into Brighton and Hove. However this is subject to a consultation which, based on previous consultations, will reject the movement of some areas of East Sussex into Kent.

The government has also changed plans for elections which are now:

- May 2026 - County Council elections.
- May 2027 - Unitary Council elections
- May 2028 - Mayoral election

County councillors elected in May 2026 are expected to be in power for only a year then support a handover period to the new unitary, though this might be delayed.

The Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority (SBCCA), which will become the Sussex and Brighton Combined Mayoral Authority once the mayor is elected has now been formally created.

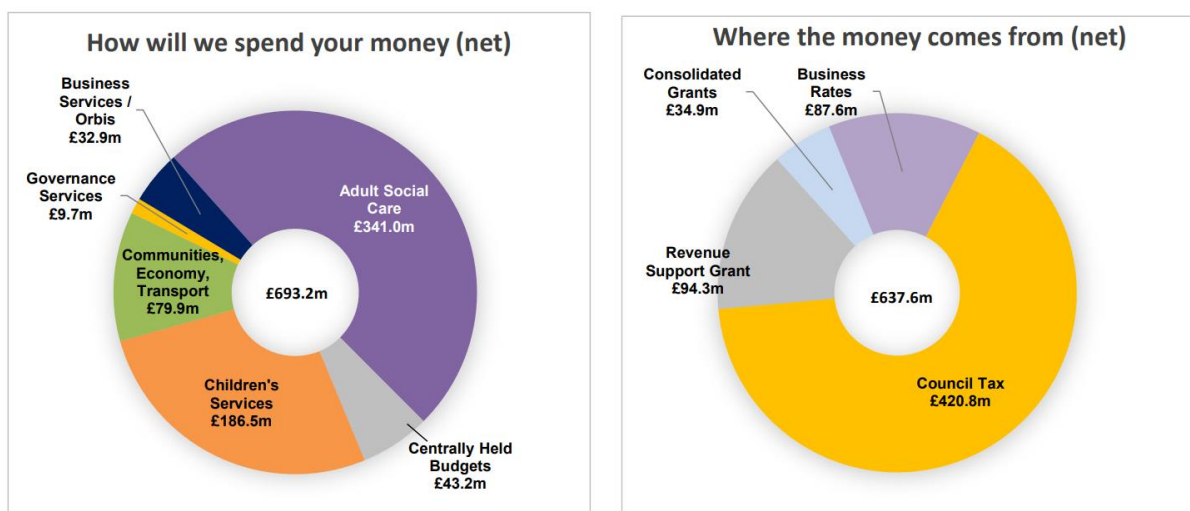
There is already an interim chief executive and team to run this, funded by extra government money. Once the mayor is elected it will also have £38M a year of government funds to spend on the various mayoral areas of responsibility plus any extra funds raised by local precepts which currently include the police and fire service ones. Until the mayor is elected it will still have 40% of this (£15M) a year from government.

As a member of the joint scrutiny committee on devolution and local government reorganisation I have had presentations from the SBCCA team and questioned them. Their current work is putting in place procedures for governance including scrutiny. I think all members of the committee were impressed with the capability and experience of the team as they have had these roles in other areas.

East Sussex County Budget

Most of your council tax is the county council precept, but it also includes the district council precept, a parish council precept and separate precepts for the Fire and Rescue Service and the Police. We also receive rates from local businesses and some grants from central government.

The pie charts below summarise for 2026/27 how we spend/spent your money and where it comes from.



In the year ending in March 2026 we showed a balanced budget though using a small amount of reserves. For next year we have costs of £693M and income of £637M, a deficit of about £55M. We are required by law to produce a balanced budget and, in common with many other councils have applied to the government for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) of up to £70M which has been granted. This is not a grant but a loan which will need to be repaid at some time.

EFS is only granted following an independent review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which found us to be a well-run council. So what are the reasons for the deficit?

- Budgets are dominated by adult and social care which includes supporting adults with learning difficulties and caring for the elderly. Children's services are also a significant expenditure. In fact together these two account for more than 76% of the net budget. Our elderly population includes a large proportion of over 85s who typically need more support.
- The government increased minimum wage and national insurance which affects some sectors such as adult and social care and children's services disproportionately. Extra funds were provided but not enough to cover the increase
- The government also carried out what they called a Fairer Funding Review for local government. Sadly in East Sussex this was unfair from our point of view. We also lost out as we were deemed not to be a deprived area, despite the fact that areas such as Hastings are in the top 10 of most deprived areas in the country.

Highways

The condition of our highways, particularly potholes and drainage, is the top priority of most residents and of councillors. Sadly, we do not have anything like the funds we need to properly repair and maintain our roads. In the pie chart above the total 'revenue' budget (i.e. non-capital expenditure) for communities, economy and transport is £80M of which about £23M is on highways including road safety. It is estimated that to get our highways back to 'Green' standard would cost about £350M.

The main pothole repair budgets come from ESCC general funds. Much of this goes to a contract with Balfour Beatty which is fixed price and covers all potholes *which meet*

intervention criteria, which start at 4 cm depth and various other criteria. I'd like intervention to start with less serious potholes, but this would massively increase the cost which is unaffordable given our current finances.

We also get some funds from central government for *capital* projects which can include resurfacing and similar improvements. We also have contributions from developers as CIL (community infrastructure levy) and Section 106. Over the coming year these total about £31M – again nothing like what we need. To put this in context, we have about 2000 miles of road in East Sussex and resurfacing a mile costs about £750k to £1M.