

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT 2017

Despite the very difficult financial situation, there is a good deal of success to report. The County Council has used reserves built up “when the sun was shining” to invest in the economy and match other funds brought into the County. East Sussex now is the fastest growing local economy in England, employment is high and unemployment at historically low levels. More important still family incomes are rising faster than elsewhere. East Sussex was awarded £13.2 million from the Government’s Local Growth Fund in February 2017, following a bid by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). East Sussex County Council will receive £8.2 million for the East Sussex Strategic Growth Project to create new employment developments in areas including Bexhill and Eastbourne. £5 million has been granted towards a £44 million redevelopment of the Devonshire Park area including a new conference complex. More than 1,000 new jobs are expected to be created as a result. The Link Road is bringing new businesses to North east Bexhill and SeaChange, the business partnership in which the County Council plays a large part is working successfully to regenerate Bexhill and Hastings.

Funding was secured to allow Business East Sussex – the county’s ‘growth hub’ to continue for two further years. The service is aimed at supporting businesses at all stages of growth, and helps businesses to find all the information, advice and support they need in one place. Since launching in July 2015, the service has engaged with more than 1,100 businesses and has helped new businesses to get off the ground, including a fashion business which now has an international reputation. During the last year Locate East Sussex has helped 35 companies start up, relocate or expand.

East Sussex County Council is one of seven local authorities which have agreed to form a partnership called Transport for the South East (TfSE). The vision for this new body is for strategic transport planning for the whole area, unlocking economic growth and improving lives for residents. To begin with, TfSE will run in shadow form as it develops its strategy and operation, consulting with transport operators, businesses and the public. With government agreement, TfSE could move to full operation from 2019. A particular aim is to bring high-speed rail to the county.

Building new businesses is important not only for jobs but for our ability to deliver public services. Business rates will increasingly take the place of the Government support for local spending. Between 2015/16 and 2019/20 East Sussex will lose more than 94% of the already shrunken Revenue Support Grant. When account is taken of the amount the Government calculates will be distributed from its share of business rates the percentage loss is less – about 55 % or £54 million pounds. The County has made a four year deal to provide the necessary certainty to plan ahead as to how best to achieve the savings that continue to be necessary. This year, by altering the way we deal with debt and other measures, we reduced the amount we needed to cut from £23 million to £17 million. Together with Surrey and now Brighton and Hove we have brought a number of our

business services together in a joint organisation, ORBIS, but there is a limit to what can be achieved by efficiency savings.

We shall be spending £365 million in this year's budget and intend to make savings of £17 million. We have taken full advantage of the 3% adult social care levy agreed to by the Government and have increased Council Tax by 1.99% – a total increase to the County Council's precept of 4.99%. Some last minute changes were agreed as our good housekeeping left us with some "one-off" money and we are

- **investing a further £1.3million in highways drainage and pavements**
- **making a further £150,000 available in the Community Match scheme and**
- **allocating £750,000 to schools in recognition of the budgetary pressures they face.**

The Draft Funding Formula for schools, on which the Government has recently completed public consultation disadvantages primary schools with less than 200 pupils. Dallington, already facing many cost pressures, would face a significant loss of funding. I have been campaigning with our MP and the County Council to get the formula changed. We shall not know whether we have been successful until later in the year, but it looks as if we have got the case for rural primary schools across. ESCC are also trying to prevent the apprenticeship levy being applied to small schools.

East Sussex County Council and Skills East Sussex (the county's employment and **skills** board) secured funding from the Careers and Enterprise Company for Progress – a new project aimed at equipping people with the skills needed by business and preparing them for the world of work. The project (April 2016 and July 2017) includes work experience for pupils in years 10 and 11, visits to businesses, work readiness programmes, tailored support for young people wishing to access apprenticeships and the STEMfest project, aimed at encouraging students to study science, technology, engineering and maths.

A number of positive **educational results** were reported in the summer, including improvements in both GCSE and A level results. At Key Stage 1, the percentage of East Sussex pupils achieving the expected standard was higher than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stage 4 our Progress 8 score was +0.04, significantly higher than the national average of -0.03. 87.1% of our primary schools are judged to be good or outstanding, an increase of 10.1 percentage points since August 2015. 77.8% of secondary schools and 100% of maintained special schools are good or outstanding. For comparison the national averages are 77.6% and 93.2% respectively.

A new seven-year contract for the provision **of highway services** in the county began on 1st May 2016. The contract with Costain CH2M replaced the existing arrangement of three separate contractors being responsible for highways, street lighting and traffic signals. The

new contract has seen the introduction of a new website and online system for people to report highways issues; www.eastsussexhighways.com. In the first 6 months of the contract East Sussex Highways completed over 220 planned road works, 10,000 minor works, laid 64 miles of tarmac, answered 26,000 calls and progressed major works in areas such as Hailsham and Uckfield.

Our e-Sussex project to rollout faster **broadband** in previously isolated areas has improved access to services, jobs and education. Over 66,000 premises have been connected in the first phase of works, although I find it disappointing that not all connections have brought greater speeds. The second phase to connect a further 5,000 of the hardest to reach premises in the county is underway and in the latest contract there is much more focus on obtaining genuinely faster broadband.

Significant progress has been made in delivering **East Sussex Better Together (ESBT)**, the programme led by two local NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (Eastbourne, Hailsham & Seaford CCG and Hastings & Rother CCG) and East Sussex County Council to transform health and social care services. In 2016 for example, six integrated locality based teams of health and care professionals were brought under single management to deliver more cohesive care, more quickly. We launched nurse-led Crisis Response Teams, helping to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, and also a new frailty service at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust which helps the frail to live independent and healthy lives out of hospital. In addition, Health and Social Care Connect (HSCC) a new integrated point of contact for adult health and care is receiving 8,000-9,000 enquiries a month.

Between April and December 2016, 100% of working age adults and older people supported by **Adult Social Care** received self-directed support. 98.2% of new clients who received short-term services to increase their independence made no further request for support. This means that more service users are planning how they want their social care needs met and have more control over their support. In addition in, 2016-17 so far, 2,872 people have been supported by STEPS, which helps people maintain independence within their own homes.

Public Health has been leading a programme of work to tackle the health effects of **cold homes**. Work included training frontline professionals to enable them to identify people living in cold homes and refer them onto appropriate services. 374 referrals to the Winter Home Check were made between October and December 2016. Public Health also developed a Stay Well this Winter campaign and helped to develop a Locally Enhanced Service for GP staff to help them identify patients at risk of fuel poverty.

A new integrated service bringing **health visiting and children's centres** together was launched in June 2016. The new service aims to help families be self-sufficient in their

communities by providing appropriate early intervention and support, and keep children aged 0-5 safe and healthy by providing accessible, comprehensive, high quality services, promoting social inclusion and equality and respecting diversity.

Our Children's services are second to none but improvement is always possible. Let me single out this year the percentage of court proceedings completed within 26 weeks, important to ensure timely decision making about long term **care for children**, which has increased from 22% in April 2016 to 63% in December 2016. I am also proud that the Council has been reaccredited as a White Ribbon authority recognising our commitment to work to end domestic violence and sexual abuse and ensure survivors can access help and support.

Finally, the **3SC** (Three Southern Counties) partnership of East Sussex, Surrey and West Sussex submitted a proposal to Government late in 2016, seeking to open formal negotiations on a devolution bid. If successful, the bid will help unlock new growth and spearhead a transformation in how public services are delivered in the region. Due to a Government stock-take on devolution activity and other national developments, formal negotiations on the devolution bid are likely to be delayed. Although a strategic pause on activity began in January 2017, work on specific activities including the 3SC Infrastructure and Skills Strategies, digital plans and responses to the Industrial Strategy and Housing White Paper continue. Devolution seems to me essential in our over-centralised state and I hope to see work resumed as soon as possible.