

Tory-run Hampshire council says it faces 'financial meltdown'

Hampshire County Council announced in its Cabinet paper due to be heard on the 10th October that without help it will be forced to make drastic cuts to local services to avoid bankruptcy.

The expected deficit revenue budget in 2025/26 year is expected to be £132 million.

Added to that deficit, there are still £70m worth of annual planned savings in '21 and '23 that haven't happened yet.

The Council has published the paper for Cabinet indicating how they could reduce their budget by a significant sum, but it still leaves £57million in recurring income still to find.

All cost lines have been considered for reduction or rethink and many voluntary organisations will miss out. Consultations are planned for each subject, but the strain on the public finances is terrible. Even grants given to Councils are being taken away soon after they are given.

Bus Improvement Grants

So it was good to hear the news that a sum of just under £8m over two years had been granted recently to HCC bus to implement the 'Bus Back Better Improvement Plans +'. I raised the matter of the poor timekeeping, and the importance of the dwindling numbers especially on 'The Spring'. I have been assured that the officer will take up the matter again with staff and feed back to me. This scheme is aiming to counteract the poor service which is leading to intermittent use, but the aim of the scheme is to provide good, reliable services which are self-funding even when the money runs out in 25/26. But this is also the year of the proposed cuts.

School transport is covered by a different budget- this year it cost approx. £50m for 13500 children.

I have been assured that the Henry Beaufort school buses in the Worthys will remain in place, at least for a few years.

HCC took over on-street parking on October 1st. In his first answer to my question at HCC Council on the 28th September, Cllr Adams Kings said that introducing charges to park in my division (including on Alresford's shopping streets, 'wasn't on his radar', but that doesn't rule out changes in future. I urge you to be vigilant too, as there's a strong case to preserve free parking in a market town for the sake of the economy.

The HCC officer has contacted me about a yellow line request in Micheldever -which is helpful- because the uncertainty of the arrangements meant that it was stuck on a list. It indicates to me that the service, so long in limbo, is up and running again.

You can see the full range of Council questions -and answers- by going to www.hants.gov.uk, search 'your council', then 'calendar,' and then click on 'Full Council 'on the 28th September. Questions start at about 11 am (1 hour into the webcast) and last about half an hour, or you can click on them from the agenda.

Libraries are now within Children's Services and the business is doing well with increased library take up. There are lots of groups too and their intention is to start holding classes there too, working in range of materials on a variety of topics. If you have children, please use your local library if you can. Thank you!

County consultation on Adult Services Provision (care homes) is currently continuing until 12th November. Details in my September report.

M3 Junction 9 NSIP work continues. HCC is the highway authority and as such is purely involved with the design of the highway. They have declared at the Public Enquiry meetings that they do not need a design code (which makes your section of motorway relevant in ecology and landscape to your area) or that they have discussed the carbon footprint with NH. This is disappointing, but these other matters are being covered by the other host authorities: WCC and SDNP. I am liaising with all three.

