

# EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

By Cllr Francis Whetstone

After many years of lobbying, and trying to explain to Ministers the nature of East Sussex's funding difficulties it was decided to change tack by presenting specific figures rather than arguing within the global amounts presented by the Local Government Association.

The result was the East Sussex 'Core Offer' which set out the Budget for the next three years, showing how a balanced budget for this year would in three years deteriorate into a sizeable deficit. (It was widely circulated in consultation which most of you will have seen.)

With this to hand the lobbying was redoubled and the message driven home to all in Central Government of the impending crisis. Not only did our method resonate with our targets but the method was seized upon by other Authorities so that the East Sussex Offer was often to the fore when local government finance was discussed in the media, specially after the implosion of Northamptonshire, it became clear that many other authorities found the present situation a very nasty surprise for which they were quite unprepared but for which we had taken considerable trouble to prepare.

The principle cause of our difficulties is the Government's effort to restore sound finances to our Country. Unfortunately Whitehall's main concern seems to have been to keep the discomfort as far from its door as possible. As various problems have arisen we have given various one-off payments, for Adult social care & potholes for instance but these are not solutions but ,in a popular phrase " just kick the can down the road" to face the same problem there next year".

At the same time most of Business Rates are being returned to the Local Authorities. Basically a good idea but not in our case as most of the employment is provided by small employers many of whom are exempt. Whilst this can have advantages in bad times it means that we are losing a large amount of Government grant. We are therefore making strenuous efforts to increase employment in the County.

Whilst it may seem that that is all that we have been concerned about in the ending year we remember that our four Ambitions are: Driving sustainable economic growth; Keeping vulnerable people safe; Helping people to help themselves; & making the best use of our resources. Circumstances have meant that sometimes difficult to achieve but we have always tried to keep them as our guiding principals.

*March, 2019*

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