

Hampshire County Councillor report

February 2024

1. County Council Budget Consultation

You will no doubt have seen the publicity about councils 'going bust' in the last few months. The latest was Nottingham City Council, closer to home Southampton City Council is close to declaring it cannot deliver a balanced budget and Somerset Council is asking the Government to allow them to increase Council Tax by 10% this year to avoid the same situation. Hampshire County Council is not in that position, yet. Unusually for many councils it projects its finances ahead by a number of years. As I have mentioned before, these projections show that while it will be able to balance its budget for the next two years, by 2026 there will be an anticipated shortfall of £132 million.

The County Council has a legal responsibility to carry out certain functions. Examples of this are social care costs for older people, support for those with disabilities, the care of vulnerable children and young people and school transport for those who meet the necessary criteria. These mandatory services are increasingly expensive without sufficient government support to fund them fully.

Other services are discretionary, the council chooses to do these. HCC therefore has to consider ways by which it can balance its budget going forward, absent government support. As a result, it has now launched its consultation on how it might change its discretionary services to meet that budget shortfall. These include:

School Crossing Patrols - HCC do not have a legal duty to provide school crossing patrols. It does however have a legal duty to ensure children can travel to school safely.

Winter Gritting Routes - these have not been reviewed in many years, so it will be testing whether the current network is needed.

Community Transport and Bus Services - there is no legal duty for the County Council to support community transport or to subsidise bus routes. However, both these can play a vital role in combatting social isolation and enabling access to vital services.

HWRCs – I talk more about this below.

You can read more about the consultation here: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/future-services-consultation> I do encourage you to take part, do not rely on others to do so.

2. Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs)

Hampshire is the best served county in terms of its waste and recycling centres, we have more per square mile, per head of population and open them longer than any other area. As a Waste Disposal Authority, the county council is obligated to arrange for the deposit of household and garden waste at no charge under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In 2022/23, residents made 2.1 million bookings, depositing nearly 120,000 tonnes of waste across our 24 HWRCs, costing over £10 million a year to operate.

The county council is now consulting on a range of proposed changes to save money, including:

- charging for discretionary services (such as premium booking slots, additional services by site staff and chargeable items like gloves and sacks)
- alternative delivery models, such as handing over management to charities or community organisations or districts or borough managing some sites
- reductions to types of waste accepted at some sites
- reducing opening days and or hours
- Potential reductions to opening hours and days to achieve savings
- reducing the number of sites.

In assessing whether sites should be considered for closure, the council has split the sites into four tiers, based upon their size, usage and the cost of running them and is consulting on three options, no closures, just closing Tier 4 or closing Tiers 3 and 4. The tiers are as follows:

- Tier 1 are newer, larger sites; these are Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Gosport, Segensworth, Waterlooville and Winchester
- Tier 2 are strategic locations which may need some investment; these are Alton, Efford, Farnborough, Havant and Netley
- Tier 3 are smaller, more operationally challenging sites and comprise Aldershot, Bordon, Casbrook (Romsey), Hedge End, Marchwood, Petersfield and Somerley
- Tier 4 are the smallest sites, poorest performing and most expensive to run; they are Alresford, Bishops Waltham, Fair Oak, Hartley Wintney, Hayling Island.

Not all the proposals may be taken forward but savings will have to be found, especially following the additional £2m per annum cost as a result of the Government's ban on charging for DIY waste, as I mentioned last month. Given so many of the Tier 4 sites are near us, I do urge you to make your thoughts known about this.

3. New 20mph policy introduced

HCC's new policy on 20mph speed limits has now been introduced. It largely reflects the policies we have discussed before. By way of reminder, the new policy allows the council is to introduce speed restrictions where there is a proven safety need for them, for example outside schools. In addition it allows communities to request the introduction of 20mph zones in their own area, subject to meeting specified criteria.

One of criteria, as I have mentioned before, is clear evidence of community support as 20mph zones can be very divisive. Secondly, communities will need to fund the introduction of the schemes they request themselves. This should be possible through the use of Community Infrastructure Levy or other forms of developer contributions. Given the financial challenges I have referred to above, the county council does not have the resources to fund these. Communities should also give thought to measures to reduce speed, such as Speed Indicator Devices, which are already working well across the Meon Valley Division.

Councillor Hugh Lumby, Meon Valley Division

