

Public Document Pack

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11 December 2023

Dear Member,

County Council - Friday, 15 December 2023

Please find enclosed the briefing notes for the motions to be debated at the meeting of the County Council to be held on Friday, 15 December 2023.

Agenda No	Item
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10(a) Motion on Funding	(Pages 3 - 6)
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Briefing note on factual background information attached.

10(b) Motion on Food Security	(Pages 7 - 8)
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Briefing note on factual background information attached.

Yours sincerely

Tony Kershaw
Director of Law and Assurance

To all members of the County Council

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County Council – 15 December 2023**Item 10(a) – Notice of Motion from Cllr Kirsty Lord on Funding****Briefing Note****Local Government Funding**

Funding from the Government for local authorities is through the Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA).

The SFA is a combination of Revenue Support Grant and business rates baseline funding and is determined through a national formula. Since 2015/16, SFA for West Sussex County Council has reduced from £157m to £82m in 2023/24 – a reduction of £75m (48%).

Core Spending Power

Each year, the Local Government Finance Settlement also publishes figures for Core Spending Power. In addition to the SFA, this includes other general service grants and forecast income from Council Tax collection. Core Spending Power will always assume that Council Tax is increased by the maximum allowable subject to referendum thresholds as well as making assumptions for our Council Tax Base and collection rates.

Since 2015/16, Core Spending Power has increased by 41%. This is largely driven by increases in Council Tax, dedicated Adult Social Care grants and the general services grant. All such grants are time limited and local authorities remain unclear year on year on their continuation which makes long term planning and financial sustainability extremely challenging.

Autumn Statement 2023

On 22 November the Chancellor published his Autumn Statement 2023. Although additional funding was announced for councils with housing and planning responsibilities, there was no reference to additional funding for county councils or any recognition of the significant financial pressure facing county councils.

Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25

The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 is expected to be published the week commencing 18 December 2023. Similar to last year, the Government published a 2024/25 funding policy paper on 5 December 2023.

The policy paper gave an indication of the inflationary uplifts in government funding expected for 2024/25 and which are broadly in line with the current assumptions. Similar to the Autumn Statement, the policy paper did not indicate any new funding for social care and home to school transport – the two biggest financial pressures currently facing West Sussex. The County Council will now await the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 but based on the Autumn Statement and the Policy Statement it is unlikely there will be any new funding.

The provisional settlement is expected to be subject to 28 days consultation as in previous years before the final settlement is published in February 2024.

Lobbying

Lobbying plays a critical part in discussions with the Government on Local Government Funding. This takes a variety of forms through the year:

- Through work with district and boroughs;
- Engagement with local MPs to raise awareness of local issues for their support in lobbying for local issues with the Government;
- Collectively with the South East 7 group of Local Authorities (West Sussex, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Hampshire, Medway and Kent);
- Through the County Councils Network (CCN);
- In collaboration with partners of service specific issues; and
- Writing directly to ministers.

Prior to the Autumn Statement 2023, specific lobbying activities relating to funding included:

- West Sussex took part in the Society of County Treasurers Budget Survey which supported the CCN in its calling for emergency funding for children services this year;
- West Sussex support to a CCN letter to the Chancellor and Levelling Up Secretary outlining the findings of the budget survey and based on this evidence the Autumn Statement financial asks. This received extensive media coverage through the BBC, Sky News, The Guardian, Independent, The Sun, Talk TV and across BBC regional radio.
- A letter from the Leaders of the five county councils that are part of the SE7 group to the Chancellor urging the Government to provide essential funding for children's social care and home to school transport in the Autumn Statement and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

Given the disappointment in the announcements made in the Autumn Statement 2023, lobbying has continued to try to encourage the Government to recognise the role local government plays in delivering services to its residents and the risk to front line services if no new funding is identified in the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement due to be published later this month. This has included:

- A joint letter from the Leaders of the county councils through the County Councils Network expressing concern that the Autumn Statement did not address the severe and mounting financial pressures facing well run, county and unitary authorities.
- A letter to the Chancellor from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property expressing disappointment with the Autumn Statement at acknowledging the pressures faced by upper tier authorities and with specific reference to West Sussex's financial challenges – soaring inflation, children's social care, home to school transport and the need for direction on the funding of the DSG deficit when the current statutory over-ride ends.

Lobbying will continue in the run up to the publication of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement later this month and throughout the consultation period to February 2024.

Funding 2025/26 onwards

There remains a significant financial challenge for West Sussex from 2025/26 onwards with an estimated budget gap of between £87m and £140m depending on the level of Council Tax increase. Officers and members will continue to work with the Government for long term funding reforms both directly and through the channels above. This will include funding for Children's Social Care and the Josh MacAlister recommendations, Adult Social Care and the delayed reforms, SEND and the increasing number of young people with EHCPs and wider funding reforms, previously referred to as the Fair Funding Review.

Taryn Eves

Director of Finance and Support Services

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County Council – 15 December 2023**Item 10(b) – Notice of Motion from Cllr Duncton on Food Security****Briefing Note****Background**

Currently, the County Council provides a blend of provision, dependant on the service required. The Council's catering services either directly or indirectly provided by the Council provide more than five million meals each year, mostly in schools and through meals on wheels.

West Sussex economic impact

The Council's catering services contribute significantly to the local economy by employing around 750 local people to deliver its in-house and commissioned services, across more than 200 sites throughout the county. Wherever possible local supply chain is incorporated into the offer. In the Council's directly provided Special School meals service all meat is sourced from Solent Butchers and fruit and vegetables from Munneries (East Wittering). Where local supply is not possible the Council encourages use of UK produce. These requirements are written into all our contracts. West Sussex is also a Fair-Trade County and the use of Fair-Trade produce is also encouraged in all catering services.

Plant-based meals

The Council is focused on ensuring that all its outlets that serve food, both in-house and sub-contracted, provide a balanced offer of meat, fish, and plant-based foods. The need for a balanced food offer is written into the Council's contractual, and or direct service arrangements, and is monitored by the Council as part of its contract management and operational service functions.

The Council is investigating opportunities surrounding the food it serves alongside its strategy to be carbon net zero by 2030. Our commissioned providers are working hard to contribute to these. This includes ensuring minimising food waste; that UK foods are used wherever possible to reduce food miles and support UK growers and that customers are better informed about the food on offer. One example is for school meals allowing parents to choose the meal and remove estimation and unnecessary food waste.

The Council has supported the work of the [Eat Them to Defeat Them](#) campaign aimed at encouraging children to eat more vegetables, as part of a balanced and healthy diet, and will again in 2024. We have also worked with schools via our service provider to highlight the importance of [bees](#) in pollinating our crops, and will do again in 2024.

Meat and fish-based meals

The Council catering service believes in providing all customers with choice. We conduct annual surveys of customers to understand what people want from the service. All new dishes need to pass through a customer tasting and development process, to ensure feedback is captured. Provision of plant-based foods and meat and fish is a requirement of contractual specifications. The [School Food Standards](#) 2014 stipulate that a portion of meat or poultry must be available on three or more

days each week on every school meal menu. Currently, all our school meal menus are based around the principle of a 'meat free Monday' and a 'fish only Friday', with Tuesday to Thursday featuring meat and poultry options. This has become very standard across the industry in support of encouraging a healthy and balanced sustainable diet.

Key contracts and services serving meals

Chartwells – approximately 180 schools provided with hot meals via the innovative Steamplcity model. This contract was let in 2016 and runs until end July 2026. [Video](#) giving an overview of the model. [Sample menu \(PDF, 291KB\)](#). Employs around 650 local people and serves around 23,000 meals each school day.

Easy Lunch – eight schools in the Horsham area without their own kitchens are provided with hot meals via a delivered hot meals model. This contract was let in 2016 and runs until end July 2026. Menus and company history are available on the company [website](#). This is a local (Horsham) run SME business we have worked with and developed since around 2010.

Health and Independent Living Support (HILS) - Took over the Meals on Wheels service October 2022, contract runs until October 2027, with a potential extension to 2029. Provides around 180,000 meals a year across the county to elderly and vulnerable clients, including safe and well checks, a preventative service as well as a meals service. Also provides meals to the Council's Day Centres. The service employs around 30 local staff, operating from local premises. Further information is available on their [website](#).

County Catering Services – Operating as in-house Council service providing meals for 11 maintained special needs schools, serving around 1,000 meals each school day, based within the Communities Directorate. A cook from scratch model, the service employs around 40 local staff. Recently awarded the LACA (School Meals People) Business of the Year 2022 award, and the Footprint Sustainability Public Sector 2023 award for its meal services. [Sample menu \(PDF, 2MB\)](#).

Summary

The Council has a key role to play in providing meals served in schools, day centres, children's homes and in its Meals on Wheels service. In many of these services there are national standards that must be adhered to, such as The School Food Standards, 2014 and The National Association of Care Catering standards for Meals on Wheels. The Council ensures that these are continually met and monitored for compliance. The standards ensure that a varied diet is catered for. Provision is also made for special diets for medical requirements, and for lifestyle and faith reasons. Every day there are two to three meal options for children in schools, across the 190-day academic year. Meals on Wheels residents, some of whom are on a 365-day service, are able to choose from five main meal options daily. We seek to ensure that all people, regardless of their individual circumstances or need, can access a safe, nutritious, and varied meals service.

Lee Harris

Director of Place Services