

Public Document Pack

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12 October 2018

Dear Member,

County Council - Friday, 19 October 2018

In relation to the petition set out at item 6 on the Council agenda, please find attached the briefing note and statement by petitioners.

Agenda No	Item
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6.	Petition (Pages 3 - 6)
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The following documents are attached:

- Briefing note by Director of Law and Assurance
- Statement by Petitioners

Yours sincerely

Tony Kershaw
Director of Law and Assurance

To all members of the County Council

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Petition: Save Crawley Open House – Briefing Note

The County Council's Forward Plan, published on 29 August 2018, sets out a range of budget options that are being considered. These are driven by the scale and challenge of the financial position of the Council in its planning of the budget for 2019/20. The Council's sources of pressure, particularly in the areas of adults' and children's social care, are shared by all other local authorities which carry these statutory responsibilities. These particular pressures are not carried by district and borough councils.

The timing of the Forward Plan was to enable public and stakeholder engagement prior to the taking of these decisions. The critical issue for the County Council is that, if these options are not considered, it must look at other options. The option it does not have is to fail to deliver its statutory duties and so all areas of discretionary spend must be considered. None can reasonably be ruled out.

The Forward Plan included a proposal to consider changes to levels of funding for supported housing - that the Cabinet Member would, during September 2018, lay out the process for consultation and engagement during which representations should be made to the Cabinet Member for Adults and Health by the beginning of December, the month in which the decision is due to be taken.

No decisions on future funding of these services have yet been taken.

This proposal was considered, among others, at a meeting of the Council's Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee in September at which representations were made and the concerns and challenges debated. The decision to initiate the consultation and engagement process was then taken and the process is now underway.

The district and borough councils in the county carry statutory housing and homelessness responsibilities. The County Council carries responsibilities for the care and wellbeing of vulnerable adults and children. The County Council remains committed to working with district and borough partners and the voluntary sector to ensure that these responsibilities can be met in a coordinated way but in ways that are financially sustainable in the context of the range of other service responsibilities the councils carry and the pressures they are needing to plan for.

As part of the engagement process the Council's officers will work with a coalition of providers as well as contract holding organisations. If changes need to be made as a result of the eventual decision the Council will take, it will look at how remodelling and different funding options can be used to ensure service sustainability for the longer term.

Tony Kershaw

Director of Law and Assurance

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Petition: Save Crawley Open House – Statement by Petitioners

'This petition demands that West Sussex County Council rejects the proposed cuts to Housing Related Support, which will cause untold misery for the most vulnerable members of our society, and instead maintains this vital support for our local homeless.'

The message is clear: West Sussex residents are calling upon county councillors to rule out cuts to Housing Related Support, not just to put them out to consultation, not to delay them until the budget-setting meeting and not to express personal concerns before ultimately voting them through.

While district-tier councils, as housing authorities, deliver statutory housing functions, this funding is about West Sussex meeting its duty of care to vulnerable adults, part of the Council's social care role. In fact since 2003, West Sussex has received tens of millions in dedicated funding from central government precisely to meet those obligations. In 2011, that funding was base-lined into the County Council's grant, meaning elected members are free to decide how to spend the money in fulfilling the council's responsibilities. Following a question on the proposed cuts I had raised in Parliament, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for MHCLG, said:

"[I]t is for local authorities, who are independent of central government, to make decisions on spending and manage their budgets in line with locally determined priorities."

That means it's up to individual county councillors to decide whether this funding is worth maintaining. Let's be clear exactly who depends upon these services, it's rough sleepers with nowhere to go, women fleeing domestic abuse, children exiting care and older people who need help to stay in their own homes. The people this money is there to support are the most vulnerable members of our society, people who count on us to stand up for them.

No one doubts the county council faces tough financial choices, least of all other councillors, but prevention is key to cutting costs. As Cllr Daniel Humphreys, Leader of Worthing Borough Council, recently told members of Adur and Worthing Councils:

"I suspect that if this money was taken away the people who are being supported would probably just end up back on the doorstep of County Hall needing other forms of Adult Services anyway."

When we remove at-home support from older people, they are forced into nursing homes. When we push children out of supported housing they become a new generation of street homeless. When we leave people on the streets, every part of the public sector feels the effects. The costs just keep going up.

There is another way, other councils have successfully focused on generating new revenue instead of making efficiencies, but even when it comes to cuts we've shown there are far better alternatives than this. Residents, charities, local MPs, councillors and council leaders, and even the Government has made it clear West Sussex doesn't have to make these cuts, it is up to members of the County Council to now decide if they will stand with us in supporting the vulnerable.

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