**County Councillor Report from Cllr Janet Duncton, WSCC**

At last our budget is done for 24/25 and what a task it’s been.  We’ve had 3 workshops during the year for us bank benchers to have our input and although some will be disappointed I am sure we now have a balanced budget and no cuts to our Services.

As I have said before this is not only achieved by making cuts it is much about doing some things differently and most of the time we have found ways to perform our responsibilities without making cuts but doing things in a different way and this year we had a new Director of Finance who looked at every issue and did just that.

One of the good things is that although we don’t like using our reserves we had put in the budget that we would be using some very limited reserves that we knew could be replaced. However, good news.  Just days before making budget decisions and of course after releasing the original papers the Government came up with another 16 million plus and the upshot was that we did  not have to touch the reserves.

Just some headlines

An additional £31.2m for vulnerable children and young people

£18.3 million more for adults social care

An  extra 4 million to maintain the county’s 4000km of roads

An extra £27.8m to manage increased costs, as inflation levels remain high and the increase in minimum wages.

All very well received and put to good use for the residents.

You will be aware that this has kept us pretty busy for the last few months and at the end of the day it is a 4.99% increase in County Council Tax which equates to £1.57 per week on a Band D property.

There’s also been a very busy period at South Downs National Park.

I have said before but both South Downs and County are looking to get new Chief Executives.  In County’s case the current excellnt Chief Executive is returning to East Sussex full time and will remain at West Sussex until we have replaced her.

In the case of South Downs National Park the Chief Executive officer left on the 1st of January and we are in the middle of a long process to get a new Chief Exec.  Judging by the experience of other National Parks who have also needed new CEO’s there are large amounts of people applying for these positions so we expect many applicants which will have to be sifted through and a short list obtained.  It is probably unlikely to have a new CEO until at least July/August.

On top of this both organisations have also had to replace key Directors and in the case of SDNP this has already been achieved but at County Council we have only recently been appraised of our great Finance Director obtaining a new position in a London Borough.  She really has been an asset to County and we are sorry to lose her. She has been great with this budget programme.

Apart from the above not a lot to add.

Highways have had a very difficult time with the weather conditions etc as you can imagine and some of the hot spots I have in my division.  That said I am in competition with 69 other Councillors so need to keep working at it.

As ever please feel free to contact me at either of my County or District addresses or mobile 07979152898.

Janet Duncton

County Councillor Petworth division

Chichester District Councillor Loxwood ward

**District Councillor Report from Cllr John Cross, Chichester District Council –**

Firstly, Tom Richardson County Councillor, kindly reminded me when I last saw him about recycling centres. If you have not read or seen this yet, from the 1st February 2024, you must book an appointment to drop off stuff at the recycling centres, it doesn’t matter if its Midhurst or Chichester, the same new rules apply. Apparently, its easy to do, especially this time of the year, but I guess in the summer you will need to think ahead.

I also wanted to make residence aware, that when taking dogs out for walks in the countryside that at this is the time of year sheep are lambing and you need to be more alert to what you pet is doing. I have already heard of some horrible cases where farmers have lost sheep to dog attacks, but also where flocks of sheep have been harassed by dogs, which can also be fatal to ewe’s that are pregnant. A seemingly placid obedient dog can sometimes gallop off and cause great harm, so best to keep dogs on leads where livestock are around. As a final point on this matter, a farmer is within their rights to shoot any dog that is attacking or harassing their flocks!

Finally, I have been contacted and spoken to a few times about parking charges being increased. Nobody wishes parking charges to go up, albeit by less than inflation, but any responsible council must make sure its budget balances. This present council inherited a budget in good order and intends to continue that track record. Inflation has increased, and like everyone else the council costs have increased too, that extra money must be found from somewhere. Chichester District Council like ever council has had for years little, or no increase, in the taxes we pay to central government, and we do not wish to be in the same situation as many other councils, of all political colours, of going bankrupt. Therefore, this modest increase was one of several steps that will help to keep the council’s budget healthy.

John Cross

Fittleworth Ward