**District Dispatch**

At the end of February, councillors set the budget for the year ahead and agreed to increase our portion of council tax by £5.41 a year for the average taxpayer. This decision was made so that we can continue to protect vital services across the district. Regardless of this, we are still one of the lowest charging authorities in the country.

What many people don’t realise is although we collect the council tax, we only keep around 8% of it. The average taxpayer pays us £186.48 a year for over 80 services that we deliver to support you. The rest of your council tax goes to West Sussex County Council, who receive 77%; The Police and Crime Commissioner, who receive 11%; and parish councils, who receive 4%. Each of these public service providers make decisions about their council tax increases independently.

Unfortunately, pressures from inflation, the cost-of-living crisis, and other world events are continuing to have a significant impact on some council services. However, you can be reassured that we are extremely proactive in reviewing our finances, and budgets across the council are regularly monitored in partnership with our teams. Due to this approach, we are able to ensure the council’s financial stability over the medium term.

It's important to understand that as a council we have a legal duty to deliver a balanced budget, which we have achieved again this year without having to use any reserves. This is very positive, considering the current pressures. As a result of the proactive measures that we have taken, we’ve achieved a budget that is as robust as it can be in the current circumstances. It ensures that our financial resources match our council priorities.

As people know, there are strong pressures on local government, and we’ll still face challenges over the next couple of years, which we will regularly monitor. However, we are a council that doesn’t have any debt and we are in a good position to be able to invest in and deliver a range of additional services, which is really good news.

One of our priorities is helping those who are most in need within our district, and so we are continuing to invest in our fantastic Supporting You team, which focuses on helping residents with any cost-of-living related issues. We are also continuing to invest in our Social Prescribing Service, which helps people with non-medical issues that are significantly affecting their health and connects people with other council services and organisations in the district.

We are also investing another £100,000 over the next year in discretionary housing payments, which assist low-income households who are struggling to meet their housing costs. This funding will allow us to help more households to avoid arrears or homelessness. As in previous years, we’re also providing a Council Tax Reduction Scheme to eligible residents, which can award up to 100% reduction in their bill. We are also looking at how we can further increase the amount of temporary accommodation in the district in both the short and medium term, in order to support those who have become homeless.

In addition, we are also investing £1.7 million in disabled facilities grants. These are issued to residents who need adaptations so that they can keep as much independence as possible and carry on living in their own homes after leaving hospital, which is vital. We’re also allocating £100,000 to help support businesses in the district become more sustainable, we’re investing in events across the district to help boost the local economy, and we are spending money on refurbishing our public toilets because we know how important these are to our residents and visitors.

If you are struggling with the cost of living crisis, please contact our Supporting You Team by visiting: [www.chichester.gov.uk/supportingyou](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/supportingyou), emailing: supportingyou@chichester.gov.uk, or calling: 01243 534860.

Best Wishes

Adrian Moss

Leader of Chichester District Council