

Northern Rother District Councillors' Report October 2023.

Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring as at Quarter 1 - 2023/24

Members received and considered the report of the Interim Deputy Chief Executive on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring as at 30 June 2023. The report contained details of the significant variations of the Revenue Budget and updated Capital Programme and included a brief update on the Collection Fund performance.

The Revenue Budget indicated a deficit of £0.516m against the approved budgeted drawdown from Reserves of £2,035m, resulting in a forecast reserve drawdown of £2.55m. The main reasons for the variations were detailed in the report, which included increased staffing costs, costs of the Council's district elections, temporary accommodation (TA) costs, additional car parking income and unrealised anticipated savings from the Financial Stability Programme (FSP). This is very concerning as it looks like the Council's reserves will fall below the recommended minimum of £5 million.



Rail Ticket Office Consultation.

On 3 October 2022, Cabinet had considered a report regarding possible changes to the rail ticket office arrangements in the district and it was agreed that the Chief Executive would write to the train operating companies asking that the Council was kept informed of any proposed changes. It was also agreed that should information be received that changes were planned, the matter would be referred to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) with a recommendation that representatives from the rail operators be invited to attend an OSC meeting at the earliest possible opportunity, to discuss future plans for staffing at railways stations across Rother.

Rail operators were seeking views on proposals to improve and modernise the experience for passengers, by moving staff out from behind the ticket office screens and onto station concourses and platforms. By making staff more visible, rail operators hoped to provide support to passengers where they most needed it and help to those who could not or did not want to use contactless or digital tickets. The industry was currently at local public consultation stage and each train company had produced its own proposals.

Two train operators in Rother would be affected by the changes: Southern and Southeastern. Southern Rail had set out how proposed changes would affect Bexhill, Cooden Beach and Pevensey and Westham stations. A public consultation on the proposal ran from 5 July 2023, with an initial deadline of 26 July 2023 that was extended to 1 September 2023. Passengers were invited to contact transport watchdog, Transport Focus, with any comments. Southern advised that no stations that currently had staff would become unstaffed and station opening hours would remain the same.

Southeastern rail provided an overview of proposed changes, which were detailed for Members' information in the report. Southeastern started the first phase of public consultations on 40 ticket offices in the Metro area; this period ended on 1 September 2023. Proposals for changes at a further 90 stations, including Stonegate, Etchingham, Robertsbridge, Battle, and Crowhurst would be updated in detail and consulted on in a future phase, likely at the end of 2023.

On 26 July 2023, the Chief Executive wrote to Southern Rail following engagement with Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG) and the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, details of which were outlined in the report.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- Members noted that the Hurst Green station shown in the table of proposed changes in the report was not in Rother but in Surrey;
- As many residents of Rother relied on station staff, Members would welcome robust engagement in the consultation process.
- Members were concerned that proposed changes would not protect vulnerable residents

We have attended various committee meetings over the last month.

The full council meeting on 18 September was attended by a large group of people who wanted to express themselves regarding items on the agenda.

A full question and answer session took place regarding the parking charges at Camber Sands with residents and shop owners expressing their concerns that it was seriously affecting their businesses and the area.

We both think the daily £30 pounds is ridiculous; it should be much lower. Parking should be charged on an hourly basis. Hopefully, this will come back before the Council, and we will repeat our concerns.

The dog consultation is on the Cabinets agenda for this Monday 9th. 12 Parish councils and various organisations replied along with members of the public.

The monthly report from our two PCSOs. We have had two incidents in Northiam. On the 13th plant hire equipment was stolen from the new Paddock development. On the 21st tools were stolen from a van overnight.

In Beckley vandalism of the playground and equipment took place. Please keep reporting any incidents either on 101 or 999. Rachael, our other officer, is back on duty on the 12th so any information from her we will report at our meetings.

Once again, our area has been affected by burst water mains which is becoming a big issue for our residents. We spoke to the water company on Wednesday after the latest incident and will ask our ESSC councillor Paul Redstone to set up a meeting with SE water so we can establish why this keeps happening. If your water is off for more than six hours after it was first reported, bottled water should be supplied.

Councillors Tony Ganly and Tony Biggs.

