

ESCC report to Hurst Green Parish Council on 24th February 2026

I attended the recent meeting the local Dark Skies groups held with our MP Kieran Mullan where I explained that ESCC will be reviewing their lighting policy in the Spring and will be engaging with all the local groups in the High Weald.

The recent weather has seen the roads deteriorate even further. Pothole repairs are just not holding up to the rain which I have raised to the Head of Highways. I have raised the state of Merriments Lane and the Bodiam Road multiple times and will continue to do so.

Full Council agreed the budget on 10th February. As I have previously reported we have requested approval from Government to borrow £70 million to allow us to balance the budget. If we had to balance with council tax alone we would have to increase by 19% this year. Despite having made savings of £156 million since 2010 and potentially agreeing a further £3.5million of savings this year the costs of local government have rocketed. Adult Social Care has increased by 40% since 22/23 and Children's Services by 54%. Increases to employment costs as well as inflation have put further pressure on the budget. In addition, the Fair Funding Review has resulted in a decrease of £12.6 million funding received from central government. This loss of funding is driven by several key factors in the new funding methodology: the impact of council tax equalisation; the absence of a metric that reflects the significant proportion of residents aged over 85; the limitations of using median wages as a proxy for the labour costs borne by the Council; and the Government's decision, announced with the Policy Statement, that rurality was to be removed as a factor from all but the ASC needs formulae. This is compounded by the continuation of the Recovery Grant (which has been top-sliced from the overall quantum to be paid to qualifying authorities). These changes fail to capture the true cost pressures in delivering statutory services in a county with high social care demand and a dispersed population, with limited opportunities to raise income locally.

As a result the ESCC council tax increase for the forthcoming year will be 2.99% plus the adult social care precept of 2%.

Governance

The authority's external auditor (Grant Thornton) has provided an assessment of the authority's arrangements for Financial Sustainability, Governance and Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness in the use of its resources. It is pleasing to be able to report that, given the financial challenges, GT have not identified any significant weaknesses in the Council's response to these challenges, with a green rating in terms of Governance arrangements and for Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

The full report can be found [here](#)

Sussex Councils continue to create new Combined County Authority to unlock investment

East Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and West Sussex County Council are reaffirming their commitment to devolution for Sussex.

The Cabinet meetings taking place at each local authority over the next few weeks follow confirmation from Government that the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority will be created as planned this May and releases £1.14 billion of additional investment into Sussex over the coming years.

This has followed confirmation from Government that while mayoral elections may have been delayed, devolution proceeds apace and Ministers remain committed to delivering significant powers and funding for the region.

Work to establish the new authority is already underway and partners across Sussex have been involved in discussions that will help shape the opportunities that devolution will bring to the region and the priorities for a new Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority.

The three councils will continue to work closely to finalise arrangements and prepare for the expected launch of the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authorities in the spring of 2026.

More information can be found [here](#)

Elections

County Council elections will be going ahead! The Government has u-turned on its previous decision to delay for a further year because of LGR. Therefore there will be elections to the existing County Council on 7th May. Unless the Government decides to delay LGR there will be election to the new Unitary Authority in May 2027.

Highways

Following a request to contact ESCC Highways to discuss the possibility of widening the carriageway of Station Road to retain parking, Rupert Clubb (Director of Community, Planning and Highways) has confirmed that ESCC do not have any budget to do this work. He has suggested that the Parish Council negotiate with National Highways to see if they will fund the mitigation of loss of parking.

A21 Works

I attended the Zoom call on Friday 20th February during which those present continued to push back to National Highways on the data they were providing with regards to expected delays and increased pollution once the traffic lights are installed. It became apparent that they believe the delays which will result (which they claim will be relatively minor) and increased pollution are a sacrifice the village has to make to ensure a safer junction. They stated that the junction of the A21 and

Station Road is the most dangerous junction on the A21 route. They didn't provide any data to support this assertion but said that as far as they were concerned it was an area of 'conflict'.