



Cllr Paul Redstone

Email: Cllr.Paul.Redstone@eastsussex.gov.uk

Phone: 07510 074267

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Report to Parish Councils – February 2026

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in February.

Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have been drawn to the attention of parish councillors and others.

My Activities

This section has bullet-point summaries of *some* of the meetings I have had, or actions carried out:

- I attended a panel of Place Scrutiny, one of a series where we are reviewing the way Streetworks (e.g. road closures, traffic lights, diversions) are authorised and coordinated. I initiated this panel as there have been a number of cases where I felt that coordination had not been good. At this meeting we had had representatives from UK Power Networks to discuss their view on Streetworks. The next meeting in this series is on January 30th when we will be questioning South East Water.
- As Conservative group leader on the Fire Authority I attended a briefing for group leaders at the Fire and Rescue HQ, being briefed and providing feedback on the challenges we face in the Fire Service. This will help steer what is later discussed at Fire Authority meetings.
- I chaired a meeting of the Policy and Resources panel of the Fire Authority looking in particular at budgets and operations.
- I attended the first meeting of a Reference group of Place Scrutiny to review the Exceat bridge replacement project near Newhaven. Typically in the past scrutiny committees could only review completed projects, but this did not make sense for large projects which take some years. I therefore proposed that we should be able to review projects such as the Exceat bridge with a budget in excess of £20M and a timescale of several years *during the project*. This was the first meeting and I was elected chairman. Our next one will be in April when we are briefed by the project manager from the construction company and will question him.
- As one of three councillors on the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel, we met to consider cases where a child, or occasionally young adult, with special needs is not

granted free transport to their school. We meet roughly monthly. The substantive meeting papers and minutes are not published as these concern individuals.

- I attended a whole council forum looking at the major budget challenges we faced. I raised specific questions about benchmarking the cost effectiveness of our services against those of other counties.
- I attended an SLR ('Strengthening Local Relationship') meeting with Highways and Salehurst parish council. These look at key issues with highways within the parish. Only some parishes choose to have them but they can be useful in addressing particular issues and strategy.
- I attended a meeting of a working group of the Rother Association of Local Councils to which I have been coopted, which is tasked to look at Local Government Reorganisation and the interaction with parish and town councils. At this one we were briefed by the chief executive of Tandridge District Council in Surrey who are going through a similar process to LGR in East Sussex but are a year ahead.
- I attended a seminar on the Fire and Rescue Service looking at budgets for the coming year, LGR and steps we take to ensure our culture is sensible and inclusive.
- I attended remotely a meeting of cabinet looking at budget and with an update on the establishment of the mayoral combined authority
- I attended remotely a meeting of the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve Management Committee. The agenda included a briefing on cleanup operations on Camber Sands and in the reserve itself from recent bead pollution incident by a company who has been contracted to clean it up, paid by Southern Water.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

An update on the information contained in previous reports:

- The government confirmed that county elections in East Sussex are cancelled. There will instead be elections to unitary council in May 2027. The government also confirmed that the mayoral elections will be held in May 2028 – we had lobbied for it to be brought forward to May 27.
- The Statutory Instrument establishing the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority is close to being finalised by the government and which will be signed off by the leaders of Brighton, West Sussex and East Sussex. This will become vested (i.e. have power) in March or April this year. Once the mayor is elected it will become the Mayoral County Authority.
- The Mayor will have an annual budget from government of £38M per year. Following our lobbying the government has agreed that the SBCCA will have 40% of this for the period before the mayor is elected. The SBCCA will be initially governed by a core group of 2 councillors from each of the three primary councils.
- We still await the government decision on the configuration of unitary authorities which is expected in March

East Sussex Budgeting

Final budgets will be agreed at Full Council in February but as I have described in previous

reports, we have a major budget shortfall for the coming year and not enough reserves to cover it. This is primarily due to increases in adult social care and children's services demand (i.e. more residents needing care) and increased costs (i.e. prices going up, due to inflation and increases in minimum wage and national insurance).

As with many other councils we have asked the government for Exceptional Financial Support which will allow us to borrow to fund revenue costs (i.e. costs of normal operations). We have asked for £70M which includes some contingency. As described previous, this is borrowing which will need to be paid back in the future.

Grants for Parishes

This section will occur each month and is a list of possible sources of funding for parish level projects. I have had a number of enquiries as to whether any of these could help with areas such as allotments. Sadly the answer is no – these are all intended for community/parish council projects. However I am asking this again as policies sometimes change.

- Dungeness Power Stations. I sit on the Site Stakeholder Group which liaises between the massive project to decommission these and the local community. They often provide grants for local activities including some in East Sussex even though the power stations are in Kent. For example, this Christmas Rye food bank is their designated charity. The criteria for this used to be within 15 miles of Dungeness but this has been increased to 20 miles. Contact me for details.
- Veolia Green and Food Waste Composting Facility. As a member of Place Scrutiny I have visited this site near Lewes. Their 'output' is compost and they deliver 'one tonne bags' at no cost to local community gardens and similar. I put Peasmash parish council in contact with them and they have already received two bags for the community gardens.
- Southeast Water do make grants to local communities, for example to support playgrounds
- Gatwick Airport are keen on funding local projects, at least partly driven by their desire to open a second runway which would have some impact on East Sussex, though less in the Eastern part

If you have a project which might benefit, please let me know and I will put you in contact and try to help get it approved. It seems that the best will be for those seeking funds to send me an email which I will then forward.

Please let me know if you come across any new sources of funding and I will add them to the list.