

CLlr Tom Thacker, Hampshire County Council

Annual report:

Finances

The County has budgets for 23/24 and plans for 24/25;

- but the 4.99% increase in the County Council Tax is insufficient, by about £80million in each of those financial years.
- To meet commitments, we are drawing on reserves and asking central government for more support.
- Double digit inflation; massive increase in Social Care costs and maintenance of transport commitments are among the reasons for our current difficulties.
- Adjacent Counties are indicating a need for 15% rises.

Climate Change and the Environment

HCC requires rules require that a Climate Change Impact Assessment on every key decision.

Some issues are supported by our Countryside team who have been as active as they can be with limited funds upgrading some Rights of Way and Footpaths along with some impressive work on Country Park and Gardens development and tending nature

Hampshire CC is meeting its own targets for net zero by 2050

I have the honour of sitting on the Hampshire Pension Fund Board as its Vice-Chairman;

- we have one of the strongest LGPS investment strategies in terms of supporting sustainable investment - at least to more than meet the statutory and prime objective of a return for our Pensioners.

Coastal flooding prevention is a massive expense but based on the 1.5% temperature factor used in our assessments, we will not have a problem until the next century.

Recently, many of our flooding problems have been caused by insufficient drainage.

- Some flooding comes from waterways, such as in the Bourne Valley;
- but it can also be caused by water leakage from old and inadequate drains;
- more frequent excessive rainfall and
- other factors suggest that revised efforts by the Water Authorities are needed.

HCC is reviewing its approach to the Water Authorities' right, without notice or in advance of a permit application, to dig up the highways in an emergency and then leaving HCC to make good the damage.

- Residents are generally never aware that most of the works on the road are because of the utility companies' activities.

Adult Social Care and Childrens Services.

HCC has to spend most of its income – tax payers’ money – on Adult and Children’s Services

- in excess of £1Billion per annum on Health and Social Care (HASC) and
- c. £800M on education in the County.
- Every year the County’s population over 85 increases by about 1000 and
- with hospital discharges now being hastened, the County is continually having to find extra accommodation and extra staff
- We operate our own recruitment company with Kent CC to ensure we have enough, who need to be well remunerated, which can also be a problem.
- Recovering from the pandemic has at times dictated these activities. We continue to provide or procure various forms of sheltered accommodation for the aged.

In respect of Childrens Services, Hampshire is still the only County with an all-round Outstanding approval by HMG.

There is a substantial ongoing strategy of electrification and solarization at the schools across the County.

- We currently have some 10 schools on the drawing board across the County including,
- more Special Educational Needs (SEN) facilities to cater for the rapid expansion – from 5000 to 8500 cases- due to the impact of COVID on the young suffering mental health issues.

Energy costs and statutory commitments mean that

- HCC has had to increase its annual budget for Home to School Transport from £32M to £43Mpa, much of this due to demands for transport for SEN children;
- School Bus operators are loathe to bid for their franchise at anywhere near the budgets we wish to set;
- Due to cost increases of drivers’ wages and energy costs, the contractors have no choice but to add inflationary level increases to their bids
- We are having to review the school transport charges for 16 to 18 year olds.

Children’s Services also includes caring for some 1800 children in care homes;

- some living in purpose-built accommodation;
- others in private care homes with costs met by the Council.
- Costs of providing this care often exceeds £2,000 a week per child.

Hampshire is one of the larger County recipients of Ukraine and Afghan refugees, although the costs are largely met by HMG.

Traffic

There has been a major review looking at a reduction in some 30mph limits to 20mph following on from two to three year trials across the County.

Public consultation drew in some 10000 responses; normal consultations usually yield some 2000 maximum.

- The main thrust of the responses was to question whether, without enforcement at the current 30mph, what was the point in reducing to 20mph?
- Expert opinion was taken from a number of sources, including
 - those responsible for the reduction to 20mph in Wales;
 - the Head of the UK Parliamentary Group on Transport;
 - the Minister for Roads;
 - Police- Joint Road Operations in Thames Valley.

Accident data over the past decade shows that:

- Actual average speed in 20mph areas was no different to when they were 30mph areas;
- The accident data at 20mph was the same as at 30mph;
- Electrifying all passenger vehicles by 2025 will reduce emissions, regardless of speed limits;
- With petrol and diesel vehicles, lower speeds can generate more emissions at lower speeds.

Hampshire's Task and Finish Group concluded with:

- An extension to the existing trials into many other residential/urban areas;
- Extending the 20mph limit in residential areas to be deferred until after the Summer and a Cabinet review.
- Without any enforcement, the problem of rogue drivers on B and C roads will continue. The Police has indicated that it will increase Community Speedwatch activity.

The Government viewpoint is that there is scope in residential and urban areas for implementation or extension of some 20mph schemes; it has indicated that that candidate roads would have streetlighting; at present that will be HCC policy.

For enforcement, Hampshire Constabulary has been focusing on strategic roads, but little activity elsewhere locally. The Police and Crime Commissioner's addition of 220 Officers, courtesy of our local MP, Kit Malthouse when he was Minister for Police, will be taken up with mandatory investigation of crimes, rather than traffic violations.

Highways

Just maintaining roads in the County costs approximately £46M (plus the extra £6M recently given by the Government, which is Hampshire's share of the £200M National handout.)

Nationally, the Local Government Association assesses that current issues need £50Bn to sort out.

Hampshire has taken over on-street Parking from Basingstoke and Deane; HCC was already handling parking throughout the County apart from 4 districts and the move is to standardize.

HCC is also looking at how to use unused S106 and CIL money. Some district councils in the County have upwards of £10M sitting in accounts waiting to be used. The County is looking at how and whether it can be used for improved road infrastructure.

The County has indicated that the dire situation across the county of potholes in the second half of the year has now been addressed with a different expenditure approach.

I have been pressing the County leadership to expand access to the new members' highways reporting and tracking system to residents and parish councils.

- I have made the point to the cabinet member concerned that the added information it gives will hugely improve our communications with Parish Councils and the public on the progress and tracking of issues that have been reported;
- Recently I was told that this is actively being examined now, but that there are GDPR issues that need to be dealt with, as at present Councillors can see the names and contact details of the person who makes the report, which should not be shown to the public;
- Hampshire is not considering using What3Words and for technical reasons cannot integrate its system with FixMyStreet reports;
- I understand also that, as I have requested, an app is being developed and will eventually be made available to the public so that reports, with accurate geolocation and ability to upload photographs can be submitted directly from phones;
- This would be very similar to the FixMyStreet app, the issue with that app being that it cannot be cross referenced with Hampshire's reporting and tracking database.

A343

Hampshire County Council has finally recognized the need to do something about the road, north of Highclere village that is used by Ashmansworth residents.

Last week I received an email from senior management that emergency patching and filling is under way, although no dates are given.

- Hampshire leadership takes the view it is better not to give a date and then for unforeseen issues – often inclement weather - to cause published dates not to be met.
- In the same email I had been advised that the road will be resurfaced from the A34 down to Foxes Lane.
- I immediately wrote back pointing out that the resurfacing needs to continue at least down to Seven Stones Bridge and possibly a few metres south of the bridge as well. By reply, I have today been told that the team will revisit the plan.
- In the weeks ahead the capital works team will be doing preparatory work, such as taking core samples, which will help them to settle on the most robust approach for the resurfacing.
- The team managing emergency repairs is carrying out a further check to ensure HCC targeting repairs along the A343 swiftly and will try to tie in any testing required for the scheme to be done at the same time as any necessary patching.

We have 5200 miles of road - much of it rural - to look after. The issues we are seeing around the A343 are also being felt across the county's highway network, following the weather conditions experienced during last winter.

- HCC is trying to do as much as it can with a limited budget and is focussing the appropriate treatments and resources where it believes will get the best benefits.
- The categorisation and priority for dealing safety defects is defined within HCC's highway inspection policy and therefore any works to rectify them will be ordered in line with this.

Grants/Local issues

Each year, I am given a grant pool to help locally. Having ten parishes in my division, I try to ensure my grants are used evenly across my division to help local needs. This year I was able to help Ashmansworth purchase a defibrillator.

Tom Thacker

Hampshire County Councillor

Whitchurch and the Cleres Division.