

Report from your County Councillor Sarah Osborne

East Sussex County Council Budget

The Conservatives passed a budget this month that includes cuts of over £5 million and put up council tax by 2.99%. Despite having reduced its spending by £130 million since the start of the decade ESCC still predict a funding gap of £21 million for the two years from April 2020.

Much of the funding for this years spending is one-off sources of money.

In particular I am very concerned about the support for looked-after children, which has previously been a bright spot in County services; now the excellent work of our staff will be threatened by planned funding cuts.

Also capital spending on infrastructure will fall, and the Council's reserves will decline sharply. The capital programme should create new school buildings, roads and community infrastructure – not only is capital spending falling from next year onwards, but maintenance items have been shifted into it. The Council plans to make the sums add up by paying nothing from the revenue budget towards capital next year. That's not a secure future. We need strong money reserves, but the Council's plan sees reserves fall from last year to April 2019 by 15% and to go on falling in the years ahead."

Work I have done at Lewes District Council on behalf of whole District

Council to curb use of Chinese lanterns & Balloons

I got Lewes District Council to introduce new licencing conditions to curb the use of Chinese lanterns and balloons on council owned land.

In future, any organisation or individual that wants to hire council land for an event, will be required to sign a licence that prohibits the release of a lighted sky lantern or helium balloon.

The lanterns are already banned in some areas in the UK due to the environmental risks that they pose. The RSPCA, Civil Aviation Authority, the Marine Conservation Society and National Farmers' Union are also campaigning to have Chinese lanterns outlawed because of the damage they do to animals and the risk of fire.

Lewes District Council Budget Amendments

At the February Lewes District Council meeting I got support for the following amendments to the budget for 2019/20.

1. “Citizens science” project - Air quality monitoring

£10,000 to provide residents with self build sensors installed outside their homes to monitor air quality. The principle of the project is to kick start an air quality partnership with private funding for the monitors in the future and provide an educational opportunity.

2. Recycling on the go bin roll out.

£28k to replace litter bins around the district with dual litter/recycling bins that allow residents to ‘recycle on the go’.

As previously mentioned I am getting one installed in Plumpton and I want to replace more bins across Lewes district. Residents have really embraced the ability to recycle rather than fill up litter bins and we get good quality recyclable material where we installed these new dual bins.

3. Biodiversity Improvements

£10,000 for supporting Bio-Diversity improvements on Lewes District Council owned land using a variety of improvements including nest boxes, wildflowers and to use as a catalyst for more community engagement and interest in their local bio-diversity.

More than one in 10 of the [UK’s wildlife species](#) are threatened with extinction and the numbers of the nation’s most endangered creatures have plummeted by two-thirds since 1970, according to a major report. There are good examples of wildlife and habitat recovery, but such projects are too few to turn the tide, with **public funding** for biodiversity having fallen by 32% from 2008 to 2015. But we can help (a little).

4. Trade & Investment Account Manager

£25,000 to pilot the creation of a new Trade & Investment Account Manager focusing on attracting new investment to Lewes District and supporting businesses to grow, trade locally, nationally and internationally. The proposal would enable a focused approach to boost the start-up and growth of businesses in the Lewes area.

5. Pop up and Flexible Business Space

I shall be asking for funding to develop a business case to develop “pop up” flexible business space in Council-owned empty buildings to provide an income stream for the council. Furthermore, the proposed use would directly contribute to economic growth by supporting micro businesses to expand. By their nature, micro businesses are locally owned and providing an environment where they can grow will help their owners who are likely to be residents of the District. It also provides an environment where micro businesses can network and support each other thereby improving their resilience and increasing their longevity.