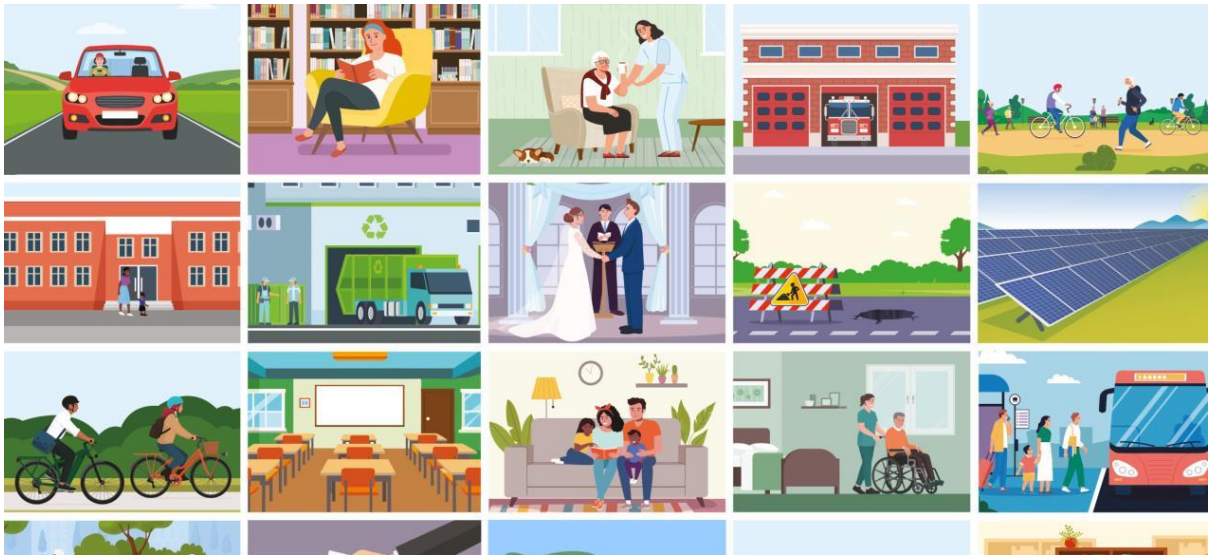




NEWS RELEASE

28 January 2026

Next steps for West Sussex County Council budget set out following scrutiny committee meeting



Budget 2026-2027 update

West Sussex County Council's proposed budget for the year ahead is expected to be endorsed by its Cabinet next week, before going to Full Council for final approval.

Proposals to address a previously reported budget gap of £16.3m and balance the budget were today (Wednesday 28 January) set out at the [Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee](#).

The draft budget will now go to a meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday 3 February before going to Full Council on Friday 20 February. Both meetings will be held in public at County Hall, Chichester, and can be viewed online via a [webcast](#).

Leader of West Sussex County Council, Councillor Paul Marshall, said: “The county council is continuing to face a significant financial challenge, with rising demands, escalating costs, and increasingly complicated needs - particularly in social care and special educational needs and disabilities.

“It’s becoming increasingly difficult to balance the budget, and we know these challenges will continue in the years ahead.

“We’ve managed our finances sensibly and have thankfully been able to successfully balance the budget for the coming year. This is despite the added pressure of the government reducing our funding by £30m over the next 3 years and redistributing elsewhere in the country as part of its fairer funding settlement.

“It’s therefore more essential than ever that our limited resources are carefully aligned with the priorities in the Council Plan to ensure we provide effective services which offer maximum value for our residents.”

The county council is expected to spend £2.3 billion on day-to-day services in 2026-27. This includes a net revenue increase of £34.7m compared to the previous year to meet increasing demand pressures and costs, particularly in social care and home to school transport.

Councillor Jeremy Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, said: “As the pressures facing the county council outweigh the funding we receive, balancing the budget has been extremely challenging. It has only been possible by introducing the government’s presumed 4.99% increase in council tax alongside budget reductions of £30.4m.

“Not increasing council tax by the full 4.99% would mean we would lose out on funding the government assumes is available to deal with pressures.

“Our proposed budget includes an additional £16.9m for service pressures and £26.8m for pay and price inflation as well as a proposed £142.3m of capital expenditure.”

The proposed 4.99% council tax increase is made up of 2% for Adults’ Social Care and 2.99% for other services.

With the Government’s proposed Local Government Reorganisation across Sussex, to establish new unitary councils by 2028, the county council is extending the current Council Plan until 2028, with an additional fifth priority added to reflect the importance of maximising benefits from devolution and local government reorganisation.

The five key priorities for 2026-27 are therefore:

- Keeping people safe in vulnerable situations;
- A sustainable and prosperous economy;
- Helping people and communities fulfil their potential;
- Making best use of resources;
- Maximising the benefits of devolution and local government reorganisation for residents and communities.

The five priorities are all underpinned by the cross-cutting theme of ‘protecting the environment’.

To support the delivery of the Council Plan the county council has launched several new transformation programmes, collectively known as Connected Council to further improve how the council operates, make services more efficient, and more responsive to the needs of residents. This work builds on past

successes and existing strengths which are evidenced by recent very positive inspections of adults, children's and Fire & Rescue services.

Cllr Hunt added: "While 2026-27 shows a balanced position, there remains a budget gap of £72.5m between 2026-27 and 2030-31 assuming a full 4.99% council tax increase in these years. Local government reorganisation is expected to come into effect in April 2028 and will see efficiency savings through the local consolidation of services. However, we will need to continue to prudently manage and deliver balanced budgets until new local government structures are in place.

"We will continue lobbying with local, regional, and national partners to ensure the government understands the needs of West Sussex residents, businesses, and communities."

Read more about the budget setting process at www.westsussex.gov.uk/budget

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