

## Rother District Council Report for Parishes 2014/2015

Funding for local councils remains extremely challenging. Rother's funding has been reduced by approximately £4 million since 2010.

Rother has continued to use its reserves to manage the reduction in revenue funding and to maintain services but this is only a short term solution. Government grant has been reduced by around £680,000 for 2015/16. This reduction was expected so over £0.5m of service reductions will need to be delivered.

Capital funds are fully committed: in the regeneration of Camber, the Beeching Road and Bexhill town centre development, and new Leisure Centre and swimming pool in Bexhill for the district, RDC will need to secure additional financial support for these eg grants, partners, and asset sales.

Whichever government is returned in May 2015, we expect to see further funding reductions in future years for local government. The combined effect of reduced funding, reduced staffing and reducing reserves will clearly have an impact on over 60 services; either by changing the way they are delivered, and who delivers them, or by reductions in service. Rother has done a good job in merging services e.g. legal, and environmental health with Wealden, Building control and Grounds maintenance with Hastings. This has achieved useful efficiencies.

Rother continues to have the lowest Council Tax in East Sussex, and we have opted for a 0% increase for the 5th year running. The freeze grant offered at 0% is in the region of £73,000.

During the past year the big project has been the Joint waste collection contract by KIER. Rother's waste collection service joined the Joint Waste Contract (with Hastings, Eastbourne and Wealden Councils) in April 2014 with changeover to the new system of collection occurring in late June 2014. Much of the District received a seamless change with an enhanced recycling service introduced allowing more materials to be collected at kerbside, including glass. This is the largest waste contract of its type in the country. The change in service and working in partnership has helped Rother avoid additional costs and maintain services. The recycling rate is 47%. Furthermore, the new garden waste chargeable service has exceeded expectations with 18,500 households in the District taking up the service.

Despite the financial climate, Rother continues to run its Community Grant Scheme which gives funding to community projects and good causes, especially in the rural areas. Over the last 12 months nearly £90,000 of funding has been allocated to projects throughout the district. Crowhurst Ward has benefitted from the Community grants scheme in the following ways: Catsfield PC received £25,000 for improvement of drainage in Catsfield Playing Field, Catsfield preschool received £1500 for equipment and books, Catsfield VH updated its Hall facilities with lighting and equipment to the tune of £1000

Crowhurst PC replaced the under 5's playground swing with a grant of £3200, Crowhurst Parochial Church Council received £30,000 to provide toilet and kitchen facilities to improve community use of St George's Church.

The **Council's Core Strategy** has now been agreed and approved. Work continues on the Supplementary Planning Documents and **Neighbourhood Plans** with those towns and parishes who have expressed an interest and have the resources.

The benefits system is undergoing changes and we have been preparing for the roll-out of **Universal Credit** in the district from April/May 2015.

Despite the financial climate, our services continue to perform strongly:

- Our performance for processing major development planning applications has improved. In April to December 70% of applications were determined inside 13 weeks. This performance is above average for English district councils.
- 98% of invoices to the Council are paid in either 30 days or by agreed deadlines.
- Our main website [www.rother.gov.uk](http://www.rother.gov.uk) has been up and running 100% of the time in 2014/15, beating last year's performance of 99.9%.
- Our website gets over 1,300 hits on an average day. We have nearly 10% more website hits than last year. This shows our hard work has paid off to get more services online for our local customers so they can access Council services 24 hours a day.
- 92% of customers contacting our Customer Services got an answer to their query on their first contact. This is an improvement on last year (87%).
- Between April and September we answered nearly 160,000 telephone calls to our Contact Centre, about 1200 calls each weekday. This is nearly 250% more calls than last year, mainly due to the new waste collection contract. The peak month was July when we answered 4 times as many calls as the previous July.
- 91% of all food businesses in Rother are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards. Back in early 2012 only 85% of food businesses were broadly compliant. The improvement is a tribute to the hard work of our environmental health officers carrying out inspections, giving local businesses advice and support and, if necessary, prosecuting.. A food business can be anything from a café or takeaway to a catering company or a local supermarket and Rother has nearly 1000 in the district.

RDC has received the SE Employers Charter for Elected Member Development ---renewed in December 2014. This was initially awarded in 2008 then renewed in 2011. RDC was commended for its excellent programme of training and development for councillors.

Angharad Davies

Rother District Councillor for Crowhurst Ward

March 2015