

Dear Eastern Rother Ward Residents,

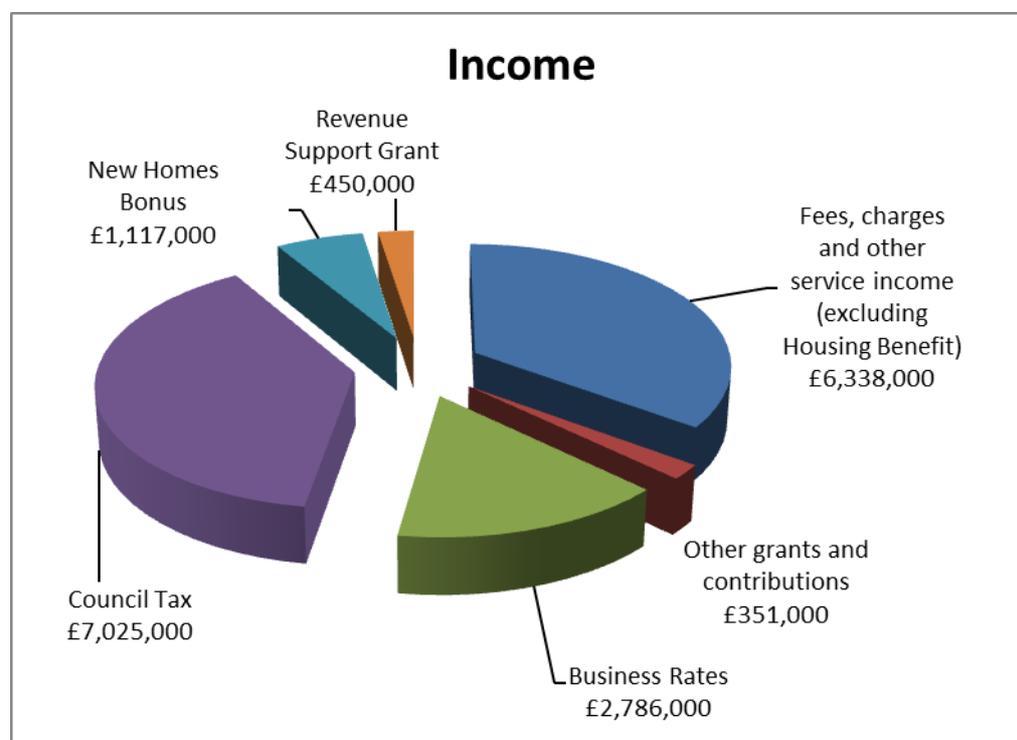
Below is a summary of the main issues affecting Rother District in the last year. Your councillors and officers have been working on your behalf throughout the year, seeking improvement in services and to achieve Rother's vision that 'Rother District will be recognised for its high quality of life, as a place where there is a strong emphasis on community and neighbourhoods.'

The core aims to achieve this vision are to have an efficient, flexible and effective council, sustainable economic prosperity, stronger, safer and more inclusive communities and a quality physical environment.

1. Since 2011, the Government has cut its general grant to Rother District Council (RDC) by more than £6 million. The general grant is primarily funded from the national pool of business rates. This amount of £6 million includes the reduction of £620,000 in 2017/18, reducing the Government's support grant down to £450,000. In 2018/19, the support grant is down to just £72,500. By April 2020 the Government will no longer pay any general grant.



2. What this means is the income to RDC has changed a great deal. It used to be that a significant part of its funding came from Government grant but now it makes up only a small proportion of the money received.



3. When taking into account other changes to RDC's spending and income generated from other sources, it is expected that there will be a shortfall in income peaking at £1.7m in 2021. To address the shortfall, a number of projects were started in 2017/18 to cut costs and increase income. These projects include adding information technology to get more automation,

systematically reviewing each of RDC's systems and processes to improve efficiency, devolving or selling some land and buildings and investing in new assets that will bring in more income. Each of these projects has a financial target. They are all on target, to date.

4. More detailed information on the Council's finances can be read in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Sustainability and Efficiency Plan sets out how it will be decided which services to prioritise and how lower priority services might be delivered over the next three years. You can find both documents on the Council's website at <http://www.rother.gov.uk/article/1059/Budgets-and-accounts>
5. Last year RDC reported that demand for some services rose and it continues to rise in the area of housing and homelessness. In response to concerns about the cost of housing and the lack of affordable housing, RDC is undertaking a scrutiny review to understand the issues and develop recommendations regarding how the Council might increase affordable housing provision. We all continue to work hard to address local concerns, along with RDC partners:
 - a. Last year homelessness applications were up by a third and households accepted as homeless were up 103% over the previous year. This year, applications remain at the same high level and homelessness acceptances are up another 26% (based on the first half of 2017/18). The impact of new legislation means more increases in households registering with us in 2018 are predicted.
 - b. RDC does not have enough affordable housing, especially social housing and low rent private sector housing. It is a problem that due to demand, private sector rents have risen and are well above housing benefit allowances, for example. This is making it more and more difficult for us to help vulnerable households into the private sector.
 - c. As a result, on 31 December 2017 we had our highest ever recorded number of households placed in temporary accommodation at 42 households. When we have to place a household in temporary accommodation it is not usually in Rother because there are very few suitable places. This year, a pilot arrangement to lease local temporary accommodation has been started.
 - d. In 2016/17 83 new affordable homes were built. In 2017/18, 35 new affordable homes are being built, these being in Bexhill and Northiam and we are on target for a further 76 new homes to be built by the spring of 2018 in Bexhill, Burwash and Peasmarsch.
 - e. It is good news that reports or complaints about housing disrepair against private sector landlords have gone down. Last year showed record levels at an average of 19 reports a month. This year it has gone down to an average of 13 reports a month.

6. In response to residents' concerns, a new part-time role of community warden has been created to work with the police to enforce low level anti-social behaviour. This is on a trial two-year basis, after staff training.
7. As many of you will be aware, RDC is undertaking a scrutiny review on the implications of moving to civil parking enforcement (CPE) throughout Rother so that we can form a view and give a response to East Sussex County Council. This work is due to go back to scrutiny on 19 March, through to Cabinet and thereafter Full Council on 21 May 2018. A number of stakeholder events and presentations have taken place that indicates businesses and residents would welcome East Sussex County Council adopting CPE.
8. There have been some issues with our current waste contract with Kier, which is coming up for renewal in 2019. Work is currently progressing in procuring a new contractor along with Hastings Borough Council and Wealden District Council. The future collection service is likely to consist of fully co-mingled dry recycling service, with chargeable garden waste and residual waste, collected fortnightly.
9. RDC staff and grants have supported 28 tourism and cultural events across Rother in Rye, Robertsbridge, Battle, Burwash, Etchingham and Bexhill. In the first six months of the year, our arts and tourism grant support brought in an additional £170,000 into Rother. We supported 12 sport and health events up to December, including new opportunities for older people and disabled people to try out new activities and events around walking, running and cycling.
10. Over 31,800 residents receive a My Alerts email, an increase of 8% on last year. This means around 70% of Rother households get our My Alerts service. Clicks through from the emails to websites with more information have increased by 31%.
11. Attendance and visits to the leisure centres in Bexhill and Rye are up by 10.5% compared on the same period last year (April – December).

If you access your parish council website, you will be able to read your district councillors' monthly reports which will keep you updated on work being undertaken on your behalf.

Many thanks to you all for your support and feedback over the last year - we could not carry out our roles and obligations without you!

Cllrs. Paul Osborne and Sally-Ann Hart