

## **Report from County Councillor Andrew Smith for the 2007/8 municipal year**

The County Council has continued to grapple with poor central government settlements, pressures on costs and micro-management from Whitehall by pressing on with its Fundamental Service Review (FSR) programme.

This has led to a significant number of senior people leaving County Hall, a reduction in costs and a new management structure where people have been appointed on their managerial rather than professional expertise.

(The Chief Executive of West Sussex CC is an ex Civil Servant where this pattern prevails – a contrast to the traditions of local government).

Time will tell whether this approach – together with a Customer Focus initiative – will deliver. Morale amongst staff at County Hall is low.

During this transition phase the County Council has made use of external consultants. I did query whether their use reflected poorly on the senior management at County Hall only to be told that the existing management was too busy with their day jobs to cope with the extra burden of the FSR. Quite apart from the fact that I thought that creating/maintaining a management structure that was fit for purpose and offering value for money WAS the day job of senior managers, the fact that quite a number weren't successful in the selection process for the new management structure suggests my initial instincts about capability were right.

The Council Council's increase in Council Tax was 4.5% this year – its lowest for many years – but still higher than the District Council's increase, as has been the case for thirteen successive years. The County has pledged no cuts but there are particular pressures on the County Highway's budget on account of the price of oil and the impact of global warming on the highway network. I think it would have been more sensible for the County to be more realistic about its ability to maintain the highways, particularly the rural road network. The County Council anticipates more bad settlements from central Government in the medium term requiring it to continue to find savings to finance services.

The County Council still relies upon landfill for waste disposal after recycling initiatives. The combined efforts of the waste collection authorities and the investment in the household waste centres means that about 40% of municipal waste in West Sussex is recycled. But 60% isn't. West Sussex CC is at least twelve years behind Hampshire. Not only does landfill go against the grain but it's costing us as taxpayers in the pocket

as, quite rightly, the government has increased the penalties for use of landfill. Next year the County will have let the Material Resource Management Contract. The contractor will be indicating what technology it will be using for waste disposal. I do not know at this stage what premium, if any, the County is willing to pay to avoid incineration. The County does have a contract to export waste to landfill and incineration out of county between 2010 and 2015 – which undermines both its opposition to incineration and the importation of London waste.

I remain a member of the County's Policy & Resources Select Committee, Planning Committee (it determines waste and mineral planning applications) and the Pensions Panel (effectively a Trustee of the West Sussex Pension Fund).

Andrew Smith  
County Councillor for Chichester East Division