

COUNTY COUNCIL – 21 OCTOBER 2014

WRITTEN QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question by Councillor Tutt to the Lead Member for Resources

Please can you provide an update on the current status of all contingency sums set aside for the Bexhill Relief Road

Answer by the Lead Member for Resources

The budget for the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road approved by Cabinet in July 2013 contained two contingency sums.

The first was an estimate of the likely cost of remedial works to stabilise the railway cutting between Ninfield Road bridge and Glovers Lane bridge. A sum of £2.0m was included, following the landslip that occurred in January 2013, as an estimate of the cost of necessary engineering works. The contractor and ESCC geotechnical advisers have agreed a cost effective solution which includes soil nailing along the side slopes of the cutting and the construction of a sheet piled retaining wall alongside the road. As such the contingency sum allocated at the Cabinet meeting in July 2013 will be utilised in accordance with the resolution from Cabinet in July 2013 the release of this contingency requires Capital Board approval.

The second contingency sum was a 2.5% Director's contingency which equates to £2.7m. Good progress has been maintained on the project and traffic has now been diverted on to the first 1.1km of the newly completed section of link road between the A259 and Elva Way in Sidley to enable Ninfield Road bridge to be demolished and rebuilt. The risks associated with the project are many and varied and there are another eight months of construction including another winter. We are currently reviewing risks for the remaining construction period. Specifically the archaeological work has been more extensive than originally planned due to the number and importance of a range of finds including prehistoric flint scatters and associated wetland remains (such as worked timber) and Romano-British iron working furnaces. The flint scatters, which represent unique information about individual groups living in the Link Road landscape over six thousand years ago are time-consuming and costly to excavate. Any release of this 2.5% contingency will be subject to approval by Capital Board in accordance with Cabinet resolution, once these costs have been finalised.

Reporting expenditure on the Bexhill Hastings Link Road, or other capital projects, will be reported through the quarterly monitoring process at Cabinet.

2. Question by Councillor Tutt to the Lead Member for Resources

Please can you inform the Council of the total amount written off by East Sussex County Council as bad debt over the past 10 years?

Answer by the Lead Member for Resources

A report by the Chief Operating Officer to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources meeting on 6 May 2014 dealt with fifty-four accounts of over £2,500 which, having been reviewed, were agreed for formal write-off in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations. These debts, totalling £616,651.90 are in addition to the total write-off for the year including amounts less than £2,500 totalling, £146,098.12, this brings the total for 2013/14 to £762,750.02.

It is evident that the recession has impacted on debtors and their ability to pay. The requests to pay in instalments has continued to increase during the last year and the Council is mindful of the pressures that individuals are facing and recognise that it is likely that this impact will continue in the coming year. The table below shows performance and debt write-off over the last 10 years. An improvement programme is underway to ensure that the corporate process is streamlined. Additionally, a number of issues in relation to outstanding debts, identified during the initial review, will also be addressed.

Like all local authorities, some income becomes uncollectable and to allow for this the accounts of the council have also always included a "provision for bad and doubtful debts" which recognise that a proportion of outstanding debtors at year end may not be collected.

Performance History

Financial Year	Total Debtors £m	Provision for bad and doubtful debts		Write-offs		Write-offs as a % of income collected %	Net Improvement/ (decline) in financial position* £m
		£m	% of debtors	No.	£m		
2013/14	17.3	0.98**	5.7	645***	0.76	0.20	(0.10)
2012/13	11.5	0.76	7.2	445	0.36	0.10	0.06
2011/12	13.6	0.87	6.4	281	0.28	0.08	(0.19)
2010/11	13.2	0.70	5.3	335	0.26	0.08	(0.23)
2009/10	8.9	0.42	4.7	431	0.31	0.15	(0.08)
2008/09	10.9	0.46	4.2	301	0.19	0.11	(0.24)
2007/08	14.8	0.23	1.6	183	0.18	0.09	0.29
2006/07	10.6	0.30	2.8	549	0.40	0.20	0.38
2005/06	14.5	0.55	3.8	965	0.53	0.30	0.11
2004/05	13.3	1.12	8.4	-	0.07	0.06	-

*Total provision (£m) and write-offs (£m) compared to previous year

**Estimate only as actual not calculated until 6th May 2014

***The number includes the under £2,500 write-offs