

# Council Tax frozen as £1.5m is committed to community welfare

East Hampshire District Council's share of Council Tax has been frozen and £1.5 million has been put aside to help the community.

The Council Tax freeze proposed in East Hampshire District Council's budget will be welcome news to residents and is the sixth consecutive year that EHDC's share of tax has been either held or cut.

As well as the tax freeze the council also plans to use savings on expenditure and money drawn from reserves to set up a £1 million fund for community grants and a £500,000 fund for welfare projects.

The budget was discussed by EHDC's Cabinet on Thursday and will be considered by EHDC's Full Council at its next meeting on Thursday 21 February.

EHDC Leader, Cllr Richard Millard, said: "Welfare remains one of this council's highest priorities and in this budget we have put our money where our mouth is.

"East Hampshire is an affluent and attractive area to live but not everyone in the district lives so comfortably and many people need our support.

"With this budget we have given every East Hampshire resident a financial boost by once again freezing our share of Council Tax.

"On top of that we have dedicated a further £1.5 million to be spent on community projects and welfare causes. This is money that will go to helping some of the most vulnerable people in our society and I am proud to put this budget to the council."

The freeze on Council Tax will mean each Band D property pays £131.11 for the services it receives from East Hampshire District Council. This is a lower amount than residents paid in 2010 and reflects the council's ongoing ambition to not rely on government grants and annual increases in Council Tax.

EHDC has only increased its share of Council Tax three times since 2007 and has the best record on keeping Council Tax low in the UK over the last 20 years.

Each council service was challenged to identify savings of ten per cent, freeing more than £350,000.

This money has been put towards launching the £1m Community Grant Fund and the £500,000 Welfare Fund. The remainder was drawn from reserves.

The Community Grant Fund will help local groups pay for ongoing costs and will help fund one-off projects.

The Welfare Fund will go towards events and projects that will help East Hampshire maintain vibrant, caring and healthy communities in which the most vulnerable can reach their full potential.

Cllr Julie Butler, EHDC Portfolio Holder for Community and Welfare, said: "This budget is a fantastic achievement and I am delighted that we are able to bring real benefits to the people who need it most.

"We are spending money where other councils are cutting back – on community and on welfare - and we are doing this in the face of difficult government cuts.

"This is a significant sum to dedicate to good causes and will help the most vulnerable people in our area."

A total of £29,000 has also been put aside to provide Council Tax support for care leavers, young people who have grown up in the care system and may need help to live independently.

Alongside these savings the council will continue to deliver high quality public services which are shaped to meet the needs of customers. A Digital Strategy and a Customer Access Strategy will make it easier for our customers to access our services.

The council is also committed to generating income through its Pricing Strategy and further investment in its commercial property portfolio. The council is building a portfolio of £200 million using the Public Works Loan Board, which allows councils to borrow at preferential rates of interest.