County Councillor Report to Councils for February 2026

My apologies- I am still in plaster with a broken wrist, typing with one finger on my left hand!.
I hope to be out of plaster in the next fortnight, but meanwhile, it's not so easy to join you in person, though very happy to talk on the phone or online if you wish.

Good news- **Govt has awarded >£3million HAF funding for three years to HCC.**
HAF (Holiday Activities Fund) was first brought in as a response to Marcus Rashford's campaign for Free Schol Meal (FSM) children to be fed during the school holidays.
It still provides a fund to each school to distribute money to those children, but it also 'morphed'I nto helping families *and older people*, and this recent round guarantees money for three years.
The fund provides free activity spaces for children in the major holidays, with food provided, and family support, importantly with a *guaranteed number of places offered for* free to families whose children receive FSM. The scheme is popular with schools and other organisations who can provide events from once a week up to the whole holiday.

School Readiness
For a while now, Children have started school in September of the year in which they are 5. But teachers are seeing a decline in 'school readiness' which means more of their day is taken up with managing children's 'personal needs'. A new campaign for parents and schoolsis being rolled out for this September. You can see this on: https://startingreception.co.uk/#the-basic-skills-to-practice

School transport and school places
The County has a rapidly growing number of SEND children, many of whom are bussed far away to a suitable school- costing £000's.
Two consequences:

1. The school transport budget is rocketing,
2. HCC is creating special school places in many mainstream schools to accommodate children to a school as near as possible to home.: nearly 170 more places will be offered this financial year, which will bring benefits to pupils, parents and the County budget at the same time.

However **HCC has just announced withdrawal of the Worthys bus to Henry Beaufort after Easter.**
I am working with parents to at least delay the bus withdrawal as there are a number of safety and practical aspects of the route that concern us all, including the Head teacher and Governors.

Potholes seem to be on the rise as is usual at this time of year. Many of the rural roads were tarmacked over tracks , and their foundations just wash away. *Temporary pothole repairs are carried out,* and only the pothole specified is mended-not the one next door!
There has to be a better way to do this. HCC received more money this year than last for this specific task- but as a result, cut the additional £5m + Council tax contribution.
Please continue to report on the HCC system and ask your clerk to track repair dates.
Disgracefully, some repairs now have scheduled repair dates 5 months ahead. The member system requires me to track each one on the system and add notes if I am not happy. **Councillors are now no longer invited to talk (and we are chided if we try) to a specific officer about the problem-** so please report holes and faults asap. Thank you.
If the due dates for work are too far ahead to be reasonable, email me please. I will add something to the member tracking update too.
But with the number of incidents, I could be doing this 24/7 at present!

Flooding- the rain has been terrible, and village ground water levels are high.
Can I urge you to set up a What's App group including some Parish Councillors, and residents in key spots, specifically for Flooding as Wonston PC has done, and add me too please? It's proving to be a useful early warning and quick action system. Many thanks.

Andover Road , Wonston and Micheldever and Alresford TRO's
The consultation closed before Christmas- but the County Council lowered expectations for a quick response- and stated it would be several months before the outcome was published. The outcomes for the Wonston & Micheldever and the Alresford TRO's are also still unpublished-I am chasing these.

Ash dieback and tree danger
Govt. guidance is putting greater emphasis on responsibility of local authorities to ensure trees lining public roads and paths are safe.
The cost implications of this are obvious, especially as the County has published cost of ash dieback work running into millions. *Jan/Feb is a dangerous time: with sodden ground, trees often start to veer away from the vertical. If you see them in your Parish- please report asap.*
The County (hopefully) will regard this as a top priority for checking.

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