

## Happy New Year

Let us start by wishing you all a Happy New Year. Each new year as it comes around, offers us a chance to bring about changes for the better and to rise to new challenges. Let us hope for a better 2023 and a year less marred by tragedy.

**Trees:** It is hard to find anyone who doesn't appreciate the value of trees. All too often though we prefer them on someone else's land. In the Spring the City Council has complaints when they come into leaf, about blocked light and in the autumn complaints about blocked gutters and slippery paths. Trees are under a huge threat too from climate change. Deciduous trees need a cold period to rest, and very mild winters damage them as much as do very hot dry summers when they are also stressed. As a result, they become more easily damaged by pests and diseases. Species like the oak processionary moth can with mild winters, survive. To try and address these serious issues and to allow our precious trees to flourish, WCC has adopted a Tree Strategy for the long term care of its approximate 32,000 trees, and those protected trees in other ownership. This addresses both the legislative and managerial duties towards Winchester trees. There are obvious budget implications not least the increased costs of tree surgery.

The major costs of new and replacement trees is not the planting but the watering for the next couple of years. New Leaf in Alresford successfully recruited foster parents adjacent to several sites to provide the necessary aftercare.

**The Housing Company:** One of the council's key priorities is to provide '*Homes for All*'. The intention of the Housing Company is to provide housing for residents who may not qualify for council housing, but who still struggle to access affordable longer-term housing within what is recognised as being an expensive private rental market. This group can include key workers.

The private rental market is shrinking for a number of reasons and landlords can for quite valid reasons, terminate tenancies. The Housing Company will be in a position to offer long term tenancies, as the company will have a long term commitment to renting homes to the community. The homes will benefit from being professionally managed and maintained by the council. The Housing Company will lease from the council 41 newly build flats at Winnall. These new properties are high quality energy efficient homes.

**Frozen pipes:** Not many will have welcomed the cold snap before Christmas, (unless perhaps you are an oak tree!) The sudden thaw at the end of it brought a great many boiler and plumbing problems. Many council tenants and others had been reluctant to put on their heating earlier during the mild November, so when they did many problems became apparent. The cold spell brought problems like frozen boiler condenser outlets. As a result, the council switchboard jammed from the many calls.

Two bits of advice, learn where the stopcock in your house or flat is. If you can turn the water off quickly you can save a vast amount of damage from water cascading through a ceiling. (It is worth turning the stopcock on and off occasionally to stop corrosion.) If a cold spell is coming perhaps think about running the heating for a bit to check that it works. If there is a problem, you have a chance of getting an engineer out before there is a rush for their services.

## £££

Just before Christmas we received news of a better-than-expected settlement from Government for the next two years. The long-term pressures remain however, suggesting deficits in 2025/6 and 2026/5 of over £2m. The work we have commissioned to investigate areas for savings continues, the principle being that the few should not be subsidised by the many.

## Satisfaction?

A recent residents survey rated Winchester Council as above the average against other local authorities, an overview of the results is attached.



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At the time of writing decoration have not yet come down.