

COUNTY COUNCIL – 20 MAY 2025

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. **Jeremy Richardson - Etchingham, East Sussex.**

The water on the A265 near the junction of A267 has been an issue for many years, so why has it been allowed to persist for 5 years and when is it going to be resolved? It has been dug up on three occasions, the Council's contractor has told me it is a mains leak under a slab of concrete in the middle of the road, the water company insist it is not theirs. It is stated that water causes a great amount of damage to the roads, yet nothing has been done in 5 years.

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

East Sussex Highways has carried out several drainage investigations in the area which have shown our highway drainage system is functioning correctly. This, along with the presence of water during dry weather, supports our belief that the source of the water is not related to highway drainage, and would point to a water leak. We have notified the water company and will continue to pursue this avenue and will, if necessary, seek remedy through enforcement. The Highways Service will keep you updated.

2. **Councillor Jo Walker – Hastings, East Sussex**

I am the ward councillor in the ward of Ore, Hastings. We have a footpath on Victoria Avenue which has been collapsed and fenced off for at least three years now. The issue being that the footpath is next to woodland and badgers make their dens under the pavement, causing various areas of subsidence, leading to collapse. There are two areas currently fenced off. The section between is also uneven and in need of repair. I understand the need for a licence for work where badgers are present, but every autumn we are told the work will commence and it never does. Despite annual assurances that work would commence, no repairs have been undertaken. Given the need for a licence to work in areas inhabited by badgers, I would like to know: What specific actions are planned to restore and future-proof this footpath, so residents have a safe, usable pavement?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

East Sussex Highways (ESH) has been in contact with the owner of the land adjacent to the highway on Victoria Avenue, Hastings. The owner has consented ESH access to land for works associated with the management and control of the badger movements and the permanent works once designed.

Separately, ESH has also commissioned an ecology report that confirms the area may have active badger setts. Badgers and their setts are protected by law. It will be

necessary for ESH to obtain a licence from Natural England as it is likely that the proposed works will disturb badgers in their sett and / or damage their sett.

At this stage, ESH is unable to be specific on actions and dates to re-open the footway until the badger issue is resolved.

Notwithstanding, ESH is committed to getting resolution to this challenging issue as soon as practically possible.

3. Andi Jaffay - Hailsham, East Sussex.

What were the reasons for the Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme (DESSS) fund being cut?

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Historically, payment of the DESSS was based on the provision of a welfare grant to the local authority via the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The actual ring-fenced grant ended in 2014/15. From 2015/16, in East Sussex, it was decided to continue the provision of DESSS on a discretionary basis and the service was consequently funded as part of core County Council budgets.

Prior to October 2018 the scheme provided food vouchers, utility vouchers, and assistance with the provision of white goods and household furniture. DESSS also provided some discretionary funding to the District and Borough Councils to provide loans for deposits and rent in advance payments.

In June 2018, following staff, public and key stakeholder consultation, Cabinet agreed a reduction in the budget and scope of the scheme as part of the Council's required savings.

Since 2018/19:

- £110,000 of the DESSS has been provided as a grant to the District and Borough Councils with the intention that is used primarily to provide temporary loans for things such as rent in advance or deposit payments.

Where the DESSS is used to fund rent in advance or deposits, it was the intention, as per the service agreement, that the District and Borough councils would recoup the loan amounts from tenants once the tenancy had been secured and housing and other welfare benefits were in place.

- £20,000 for welfare grants, has been administered through Adult Social Care and Health's Health and Social Care Connect (HSCC) team.

Since 2018/19 only 5 awards have been made from the DESSS fund administered by HSCC, with the last award made in 2020.

A significant part of what the DESSS was historically used for is now covered by the Household Support Fund (HSF). The updated HSF guidance provided by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) states that *“The primary objective of The Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in the most need with the cost of essentials. The secondary objective is to provide preventative support to prevent vulnerable households from falling into – or falling further into – crisis”* ([1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England - GOV.UK](#)), and therefore all delivery partners have flexibility in how they administer the Fund within the guidance to meet these two key objectives.

As part of the Household Support Fund (HSF) in East Sussex for 2025/26, which totals £6,867,965.88 for the full year, District & Borough Councils have been allocated £1,375,601. The remainder of the Fund is allocated to ESCC Children’s Services, Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners and other local delivery partners across East Sussex who are best placed to reach eligible households. This includes over £400,000 to Food Banks and Partnerships.

In summary, the reasons why the DESSS funding has been discontinued are that Household Support Fund monies, to a significant extent, duplicates the purpose of the DESSS funding. No awards had been made from the proportion of the DESSS administered by ASCH since 2020 and a significant proportion of the DESSS provided to Districts and Boroughs was always expected to be recouped once tenancies were secured and welfare benefits began to be paid.

The DESSS funding from Government ceased in 2015. Since then, the DESSS funding in East Sussex has been discretionary. Given the Council’s financial position and the need to set a balanced budget, and for the reasons summarised above, it was agreed to cease discretionary funding from 2025/26.

4. Josh Babarinde MP – Eastbourne, East Sussex

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the total cost of redundancy payments for staff at Linden Court?

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

As the staff consultation at Linden Court has not concluded it is not yet possible to confirm redundancy costs. Our intention is to provide suitable alternative employment wherever possible to protect staff jobs and retain the skilled and experienced colleagues within our services.

There are enough suitable alternatives to offer equivalent roles to all the staff at Linden Court should the proposal go ahead, and at this time the indication is that there will be no redundancies.

In February 2025, the report to Cabinet on ASCH savings proposals allowed for £350,000 to £500,000 for associated redundancy costs across all savings proposals. Of the savings proposals enacted to date, only two staff from older people's services, out of a total of 85 staff affected, will incur any redundancy costs. We anticipate that final redundancy costs will therefore be significantly below the original estimates.

5. Tania Bilton – Eastbourne, East Sussex

It is clear from the client assessment survey that we have conducted that not many parent/Carers will be able, or willing to use Beeching Park as a provision.

ESCC have a legal obligation to provide or recommend suitable alternative services in their clients local community. As the Satellite service you are proposing only accommodates 15 clients, 2 days a week you will need to find additional Eastbourne based services which is likely to incur further expenses.

With all the consequential costs we have identified, wouldn't retaining Linden Court in some format appear to be the best option for clients and the most cost effective for ESCC?

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Until the scrutiny (call-in) process is completed, the outcome for Linden Court is known and reviews have been undertaken for the adults currently attending Linden Court, we will not be able to confirm the number of adults who want to attend Beeching Park or want to explore alternative options.

We have, however, undertaken financial modelling for the likely scenarios if the proposals for Linden Court go ahead. The modelling shows that the proposal for Linden Court will deliver savings to the Council which are required to balance the budget.

ESCC has a duty to meet Care Act eligible needs, and we will ensure that duty is met. We will work with adults and parent/carers to agree the best alternative provision and to put in place a transition plan where appropriate.

For these reasons we do not consider that retaining Linden Court is "the most cost effective for ESCC" and we believe that alternative provision to meet eligible needs can be sourced for the adults currently attending Linden Court.

6. Teresa Currie – Pevensey, East Sussex

Have the transport and staff costs been assessed for regular trips back to Eastbourne from Beeching Park? This enables clients to be integrated into their local community back in Eastbourne, which is a legal requirement upon ESCC.

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

If Linden Court were to close, we are confident that alternative day opportunities could be identified to meet the eligible needs of adults who currently attend Linden Court. This could be at Beeching Park in Bexhill, at the satellite provision that we are proposing to deliver 2 days a week in Eastbourne, with a provider from the independent sector or a combination of these.

Without having undertaken reviews for each of the adults currently attending Linden Court and agreeing a new support plan, we cannot yet know the precise transport costs that may be associated with their new support plan. However, when calculating the potential saving options, we included an amount for additional vehicles and drivers, linked to the Beeching Park service, which could provide transport for more people, if required

Our legal duties relate to meeting peoples' assessed eligible needs under the Care Act 2014. As part of an adult's review, any transport required to meet the person's eligible needs will be identified and met.

7. Catherine Jessup – Eastbourne, East Sussex

The Linden Court Community created an evidence finding form, why have ESCC not gathered this information themselves to seek possible options from the parents and carers to provide a clear indication of what alternatives will be required for the clients of Linden Court?

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

We cannot start re-assessments or reviews of adults attending Linden Court and their parent/carers until the outcome of the scrutiny (Call-in) process is known.

If the outcome of the call-in process is that that Cabinet decision to close and reprovision Linden Court can proceed, we expect that all adults will have a review within five weeks of the outcome being known. Unpaid carers will be offered a carer's review in the same period.

We will work with adults and their parents/ carers to identify eligible needs and the best alternative services to meet those needs.

8. Inge Keats – Eastbourne, East Sussex

During the last County Council meeting Mark Stainton stated that no one would be going into residential care as a result of Linden Court closing. I can confirm that as a result of Linden Court closing we will be looking to place our daughter into residential care, due to the lack of local day care provision that will support our family. Since that last meeting the parents/carers group have done evidence gathering and it

appears that I am only 1 of a possible 9 families who would be seriously considering residential care if Linden Court was to close.

Does the council now acknowledge that there are some families identifying residential care as their only option if the Linden Court closure proceeds?

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

The Care Act eligible needs of adults are determined through their assessment – there is then a support planning process to identify how these needs can be met.

From our knowledge of provision in the local area we believe that there are suitable alternative day opportunities for adults currently attending Linden Court (including retaining a small ASCH provision in Eastbourne).

We are not aware of any reason why the proposal for Linden Court would require any one to need residential care.

Similarly, we recognise that people's needs change over time and, when this happens, a different package of support may be required. There are several options for adults when their needs require 24/7 support away from their family home including: Shared Lives, Supported Accommodation, Supported Living and Residential Care.

However, as above, we are not aware of any reason why the proposals for Linden Court would necessitate a move into residential care and we will work closely with adults and their families to identify alternative day opportunities to meet eligible needs.

9. Sophie Ticehurst – Eastbourne, East Sussex

The 3 local alternative services proposed by ESCC are not deemed to be suitable or appropriate options. Our parents/carers survey has identified Beeching Park is not a creditable option for most Linden Court clients and goes against the wellbeing you are required to deliver under the Care Act. What strategy are ESCC proposing to protect the wellbeing of clients and their families/carers if Linden Court is closed and Beeching Park is not accessible to them?

Response by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

If the proposal for Linden Court goes ahead the adults involved, and their parent/carers, will have reviews to ensure their eligible needs are understood and met and we will work together to agree alternative provision.

We will also create transition plans, as appropriate, to ensure that adults and parents/ carers are fully supported throughout the change. We have extensive experience and skill in doing this as a transition plan is often required for new

starters in our services or when adults change their current provision for any reason. This will support the wellbeing of adults' and their parents / carers.

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