

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1) Question from Councillor Hilton to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Now we have timed booking slots for the recycling sites, what provision will you be making for people to arrive on foot or by cargo bike to drop items off?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

At the moment there is no provision for this, but it should be easier to manage different vehicles and not discriminate against cyclists and walkers who otherwise have to spend money on a bulky waste collection that car drivers don't have to.

The introduction of the booking scheme in November 2025 did not change access arrangements for bicycle and pedestrian users. These have remained the same as they were prior to the scheme starting at each individual site.

All Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRS) users are now required to book before they visit. People can walk or cycle to the East Sussex recycling sites where it is safe for them to enter. However, not all sites are accessible for pedestrians and cyclists.

Six of our ten sites have dedicated pedestrian access whilst seven sites allow bicycle access.

Hastings HWRS does not have pedestrian or cyclist access. The entrance to the site is a small bridge and this would need to be widened to accommodate a pedestrian walkway. There is no pedestrian walkway along the site side of Freshfields road on the approach to the site either. There is little ongoing demand for pedestrian or cycle access at this site.

When booking at other sites, walkers and cyclists can select the option to 'Book a slot for bicycle' or 'Book a slot for a pedestrian'. We have had 617 cycle bookings and 529 pedestrian bookings across the network of sites out of a total of 113,000 bookings since the system was launched in November 2025.

2) Question from Councillor Hilton to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

In recent meetings with the bus users' group in Hastings, a senior Stagecoach employee mentioned that expenditure on repairing damaged bus suspension systems are three times higher at the Hastings depot compared to any other of their depots across the south east due to the appalling state of the roads in Hastings. Taking buses off the road for repairs also affects the reliability of the bus network.

I understand funding is tight, but can you give me assurances that bus routes will be prioritised for repairs and resurfacing given how important this method of transport is to Hastings residents?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Thank you for sharing the concerns raised by Stagecoach regarding the impact of road condition on their fleet in Hastings. From the outset, please be reassured we recognise the importance of a reliable bus network to residents who rely on public transport. We know that some parts of the network in Hastings are under significant pressure, and we fully appreciate that road condition may contribute to increased vehicle maintenance costs and affect service reliability. As part of our asset management approach, bus routes already form a key consideration when we assess and prioritise maintenance schemes. Routes with high usage, including those that serve major bus corridors, are more regularly inspected and form part of our programme for both routine safety repairs, planned resurfacing and winter gritting.

However, as you note, funding remains extremely challenging and we must balance needs across the entire county. Within those constraints, I can give assurance that we will continue to prioritise roads that demonstrate the greatest investment return and support essential services such as public transport. We will continue to work closely with Stagecoach and other operators to ensure that areas of concern are flagged promptly and fed into our maintenance planning.

In addition, we are exploring opportunities through targeted investment, government funding streams and our ongoing work with the Bus Service Improvement Plan to identify where improvements to physical bus infrastructure can best support the network's reliability.

We will continue to work with operators to monitor the condition of bus routes in Hastings and ensure they receive appropriate priority within the resources available. In the meantime, if there are any specific concerns, please ensure these are reported to East Sussex Highways through the usual channels.

3) Question from Councillor Taylor to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Last month there was an extended water outage in Forest Row, Hartfield, Nutley and some of the neighbouring areas. It also extended to West Sussex (East Grinstead), and a different but possibly related cut was going on in Tunbridge Wells, including Frant. The water was off for about 6 days in the East Sussex areas. Water distribution sites were not appropriate, nor locally informed. Whilst an East Sussex County Council (ESCC) officer, who was attending the Sussex Resilience Forum meetings, was updating me and other local councillors, there was no mechanism for me or the Parish Councils to communicate directly with Southeast Water (SEW) or the Resilience Forum. The mechanism just seems too remote. A list of the vulnerable residents who were to receive deliveries of water bottles was held by SEW, and there was also one held by ESCC and I believe, Wealden District Council. But this list was not available for local councillors nor the Parish Council,

who could have been checking to see whether people were ok. I had to pass on repeated reports that vulnerable people were not receiving their water deliveries, but not having a list to check on, I could not verify, nor visit the residents myself.

I have since looked at the online information about the Sussex Resilience Forum and find there is no useful or easily accessible information that could have been used by the local community. I have also asked in audit committee why Councillors are not more involved in the emergency response but received an answer which did not help to clarify the situation. On the one hand it states Councillors provide civic and community leadership, and will be kept informed, then in the next sentence the statement contradicts this somewhat, stating it is not advisable for councillors to become directly involved (Sounds like Councillors should simply be mouthpieces and ignore the chaotic response of SEW).

Please could you let me know what ESCC can do to make sure ESCC emergency planning structure, mechanism and processes could better include local councillors and parish councils, as well as residents more directly and that roles be clarified?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The water outages affecting Forest Row, Nutley and Frant last month had a significant impact on residents and businesses in these areas. This situation understandably caused considerable concern and anxiety for many people, who were left without a reliable water supply for many days.

It may be helpful to firstly clarify responsibilities regarding civil emergencies:

- Local authorities have clearly defined duties under the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA 04). The Council is defined as a Category 1 responder under the CCA. Category 1 responders have primary duties for emergency preparedness and response. As such, Councils are required to assess local risks, develop emergency plans, maintain business continuity plans, warn and inform the public, share information and cooperate with other responder organisations.
- East Sussex County Council is an active member of the Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF), fulfilling its role as a Category 1 Responder under the CCA. The SRF is a collaborative, multi-agency partnership that brings together a range of agencies to deliver a coordinated approach to emergency planning, response, and recovery across Sussex. Members include core emergency services, local authorities, NHS bodies, the Environment Agency and utility companies.
- The SRF maintains various plans, including a multi-agency Emergency Response and Recovery Plan and a Vulnerable People Data Sharing Plan, to coordinate multi-agency support during major incidents. These are reviewed, tested and exercised on a regular basis.

- The SRF applies a risk-based approach using the National Risk Register and local assessments to prioritize threats, facilitates information sharing between agencies, and coordinates multi-agency support during major incidents.
- In East Sussex, we also have a partnership arrangement between East Sussex County Council, Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, Wealden District Council, Rother District Council, Hastings Borough Council, and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, called ESREP. Member organisations fund a central emergency planning team to support each organisation in meeting its statutory requirements under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.
- In two-tier authority areas such as East Sussex, County and District or Borough Councils have different responsibilities in terms of response, but both work closely together to ensure affected communities are kept informed with relevant and timely information.
- Our County emergency response plans are developed in a multi-agency environment to ensure effective coordination of response and recovery. These plans are regularly tested, exercised, and supported through training among officers and responders.

Councillors play a vital role in emergencies as trusted voices in their communities. Senior councillors with Executive responsibilities provide political leadership and ensure their Council meet obligations under the Act, both in preparation for and response to emergencies.

More widely, Councillors also provide civic and community leadership, acting as a focal point for the local area during an emergency and helping to increase community resilience and supporting their ability to recover.

During an incident, we will always keep affected councillors informed and updated. While it is not advisable for councillors to become directly involved in the operational response, they provide a valuable and trusted source of information to the communities they serve.

The Emergency Planning team have delivered Member training previously, and the presentation is available to view on the Councillor training pages on the intranet. The Emergency Planning team would be happy to provide this training again if Members would find it useful.

The ESCC website has a range of useful information for residents and local communities on how to prepare for an [emergency incident](#). It also links to further information on the [Sussex Resilience Forum website](#). The [SRF Preparing for an Emergency booklet](#) contains information on what to do before, during and after a loss of a utility service.

During a water supply interruption, water companies in England and Wales have a statutory duty to ensure continued access to essential water and to support customers until normal service is restored.

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, water companies must ensure continuation of their water distribution functions during an emergency and are required to plan to provide alternative supplies in the event of a loss of normal supply. As set out in Security and Emergency Measures Direction (SEMD) 2022, in the event of an unavoidable failure of piped supply, water companies must ensure that a minimum supply is provided by alternative means.

If the supply fails, water companies must continue providing alternative water (e.g. bottled water, bowzers) until normal supply is restored.

Water companies must prioritise vulnerable and at-risk customers by ensuring they receive appropriate alternative supplies. Local Authorities support this through sharing vulnerable people data with water companies.

Additionally, during an outage, water companies must inform those affected that the supply has been interrupted, where to get an alternative supply, and the time by when the supply will be restored.

The Sussex Resilience Forum maintains a Water Disruption Plan and a Vulnerable People Data Sharing Plan to coordinate multi-agency support during a major incident involving water supplies. During a major incident involving water supplies, SRF partner support can include providing staff to help manage bottled water stations or assisting with deliveries to customers requiring special assistance.

During the recent South East Water incidents, Councillors were kept informed after each multi agency meeting, with concerns raised fed back to South East Water. As you will recall from the updates you received, Officers attending the SRF multi agency meetings with South East Water raised concerns on the first day of the outage that the bottled water stations they had set up were not accessible to the communities in Forest Row or Nutley, and asked South East Water to set up further bottled water stations in these areas, which they did.

With regards to your request to receive lists of vulnerable customers, this is not possible as it would breach GDPR. All personal data shared between ESCC and the water companies is done so securely and in line with data protection requirements. During this incident vulnerable customers were asked to contact South East Water directly if they had not received a delivery.

You will recall that South East Water also provided councillors with a priority email address so that councillors could contact them directly with any urgent concerns.

4) Question from Councillor Taylor to the Lead Member for Economy.

Local businesses and organisations, particularly in the hospitality sector, have lost thousands of pounds due to the water outage. Hotels have had to cancel events and customer stays, restaurants, cafes and pubs have had to shut due to hygiene issues, the doctor's surgery had to restrict appointments, and I know of at least one case that could have led to hospitalisation. For businesses, SEW does not appear to have to

pay for damages, and if businesses claim on their insurance, they will likely incur higher costs in the future.

ESCC aim to enhance economic growth (which I would prefer to say “a thriving sustainable economy and resident wellbeing”) is now in jeopardy, now and in the future. If this region gets known as an area where you cannot rely on water supplies, businesses and local services will suffer. Clients will not book here; customers will go elsewhere. Business will fail, jobs will be lost and we will be sliding backwards.

Please could you tell me how ESCC will work with others to make sure the image of this part of East Sussex does not suffer from further economic damage due to water, and how the damaged image will be healed?

Response by the Lead Member for Economy

We recognise how difficult the recent water supply disruption in parts of East Sussex has been for our communities. Being without water is highly disruptive, and we know the situation has caused significant challenges for residents, businesses and visitors.

Ofwat has now opened an investigation into South East Water following repeated supply failures. We welcome this scrutiny and await the regulator’s findings.

Regarding compensation, South East Water operates a Guaranteed Standards of Service scheme. We encourage any eligible residents or businesses to make a claim through the South East Water website or by calling 0333 000 0001.

South East Water’s Business Plan for 2025–2030, published in August 2024, sets out measures intended to improve the resilience of the local network. This includes around £80m of investment in East Sussex, such as upgrades to Bewl Water Treatment Works, the new pipeline from Bewl to Rotherfield, and replacement of mains between Heathfield and Rushlake Green. It will be important for the County Council, partners, businesses and residents to see these commitments delivered in full.

Looking ahead, the County Council is focused on supporting local economic resilience and helping communities recover from the disruption. Through Experience Sussex, we continue to promote the county and support tourism businesses with marketing, training, product development and campaigns to increase visitor numbers. Experience Sussex is also working with other South Coast destinations to raise concerns about water-related impacts on the visitor economy.

Alongside this, we are working in partnership with Brighton & Hove Council and West Sussex through the Local Visitor Economy Partnership to boost sustainable growth and strengthen Sussex’s profile nationally and internationally.

Businesses in the visitor economy can access free support from Experience Sussex, including advice, networking and signposting to funding opportunities. More broadly, all East Sussex businesses can use the East Sussex Growth Hub for free, impartial

and tailored business support to help them grow and respond to challenges. You can access the service via website at [East Sussex Growth Hub](#)

We hope this provides reassurance that the County Council is doing everything within its resources to support local businesses, residents and visitors.

5) Question from Councillor Taylor to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

This breakdown of the water situation is probably going to happen again. We have not had a decent account of why the water was suddenly gone. SEW said that the storm (which was not evident here locally) and the cold weather (which happens every year!!) had led to treatment sites being insufficient and cracks in pipes. This just does not ring true. We know that there is an ongoing enquiry into the SEW and we as customers and as Councillors need to know more about why and how their system is breaking down. We also need to know more about how they might innovate now to provide resilience in the future.

How will ESCC be holding SEW to account? Will ESCC push to get answers to questions about why the outage happened in the first place? Could ESCC push for a better resilience preparation and system in preparation for what the future holds. (e.g. Home water storage facilities including water butts and drinking water containers, compost loos, village bore hole etc.)

Response by Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The responsibility for ensuring supply lies with the water companies. They are regulated by Ofwat, which has already opened an investigation into South East Water, following repeated outages, to determine whether it has failed to develop and maintain an efficient water supply system. This is ongoing.

East Sussex County Council will continue to work with SRF partners to raise awareness of the risk of emergencies occurring and provide advice in how to prepare for such incidents in future. However, I can confirm that the Council will be formally raising through the SRF our concerns with South East Water's response to this incident through the debrief process.

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