

Meeting of
East Sussex County Council
on Tuesday, 8 July 2025
at 10.00 am

NOTE: As part of the County Council's drive to increase accessibility to its public meetings, this meeting will be broadcast live on its website and the record archived. The live broadcast is accessible at: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/your-council/videos-of-council-meetings/webcasts>



EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

To the Members of the County Council

You are summoned to attend a meeting of the East Sussex County Council to be held in the Council Chamber, at County Hall, Lewes, **on Tuesday, 8 July 2025 at 10.00 am** to transact the following business

1. **Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2025** (*Pages 5 - 28*)
2. **Apologies for absence**
3. **Chairman's business**
4. **Questions from members of the public**
5. **Report of the Cabinet** (*Pages 29 - 46*)
6. **Cabinet priorities for the forthcoming year**
7. **Notice of Motion - Planning and Infrastructure Bill and the natural environment** (*Pages 47 - 50*)

The Chairman has directed under Standing Order 36.9 (1) that the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Taylor shall stand referred to the County Council.

East Sussex has a significant number of nature protected areas including National Landscapes, and National and Local Nature Reserves, that are essential for the local ecosystem survival and for carbon sequestration (of national relevance) and the survival of seriously endangered insects, wildlife and plant life. This Council does not accept the current Part 3 of the new Bill and will do everything we can to ensure our essential protected areas do not get destroyed by development.

This Council calls on the Leader to write to the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Angela Rayner MP and the Right Honourable Steve Reed, to request:

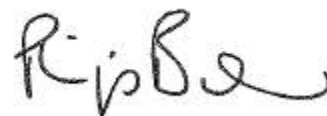
- That Part 3 of the Bill is withdrawn (or, if not, accept substantial amendments to improve protection and regeneration of nature in this part)
- That positive proposals for nature are added to other parts of the Bill
- Assurance that East Sussex nature protected sites remain fully protected

This Council also request that the Leader of the Council write to our local MPs asking them to support amendments to the bill that address the concerns outlined in the motion, and in the event that the bill remains substantially the same, to call on our MPs to vote against its adoption on the grounds that it will set back nature recovery whilst failing to help deliver either truly the affordable housing or the social housing local people need.

8. **Questions from County Councillors**
 - a) Oral questions to Cabinet Members
 - b) Written questions of which notice has been given pursuant to Standing Order 44
9. **Report of the East Sussex Fire Authority** (*Pages 51 - 54*)

Note: There will be a period for collective prayers and quiet reflection in the Council Chamber from 9.30 am to 9.45 am. The prayers will be led by Major Ralph Walker QVA, Commanding Officer, Eastbourne Salvation Army. The Chairman would be delighted to be joined by any members of staff and Councillors who wish to attend.

County Hall
St Anne's Crescent
LEWES
East Sussex BN7 1UE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Baker', written in a cursive style.

PHILIP BAKER
Deputy Chief Executive

30 June 2025

MINUTES

EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, at County Hall, Lewes on 20 MAY 2025 at 10.00 am

Present Councillors Roy Galley (Chairman), Abul Azad (Vice Chairman), Sam Adeniji, Matthew Beaver, Colin Belsey, Nick Bennett, Bob Bowdler, Charles Clark, Chris Collier, Anne Cross, Godfrey Daniel, Johnny Denis, Penny di Cara, Chris Dowling, Claire Dowling, Kathryn Field, Gerard Fox, Nuala Geary, Keith Glazier, Alan Hay, Julia Hilton, Ian Hollidge, Stephen Holt, Johanna Howell, Eleanor Kirby-Green, Tom Liddiard, Philip Lunn, Wendy Maples, Carl Maynard, Matthew Milligan, Steve Murphy, Sarah Osborne, Peter Pragnell, Paul Redstone, Christine Robinson, Pat Rodohan, Phil Scott, Daniel Shing, Stephen Shing, Alan Shuttleworth, Bob Standley, Colin Swansborough, Georgia Taylor, David Tutt, John Ungar and Trevor Webb

1. To elect a Chairman of the County Council

Councillor Azad (Vice Chairman of the County Council) in the Chair

1.1 The following motion as moved by Councillor Glazier and seconded –

‘To elect Councillor Galley to serve as Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year’.

1.2 The following motion was moved by Councillor Robinson and seconded –

‘To elect Councillor Daniel to serve as Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year’.

1.3 Voting was by roll call, the votes being cast as follows:

FOR THE ELECTION OF COUNCILLOR DANIEL AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Councillors Cross, Collier, Daniel, Denis, Field, Hilton, Holt, Maples, Murphy, Osborne, Robinson, Rodohan, Scott, Shuttleworth, Swansborough, Taylor, Tutt, Ungar, and Webb.

FOR THE ELECTION OF COUNCILLOR GALLEY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES

Councillors Azad, Beaver, Belsey, Bennett, Bowdler, Clark, di Cara, Chris Dowling, Claire Dowling, Fox, Geary, Glazier, Hay, Hollidge, Howell, Kirby-Green, Liddiard, Lunn, Marlow-Eastwood, Maynard, Milligan, Pragnell, Redstone, and Standley.

ABSTENTIONS

Councillors Adeniji, Daniel Shing, and Stephen Shing.

- 1.4 The Vice-Chairman declared Councillor Galley elected as Chairman for the ensuing year. Councillor Galley made a declaration of acceptance of office and took the Chair.

Councillor Galley in the Chair

- 1.5 The Chairman thanked the Council for re-electing him as Chairman for a further year.

2. To appoint a Vice Chairman of the County Council

- 2.1 The following motion as moved by Councillor Glazier and seconded –

‘To elect Councillor Azad to serve as Vice Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year’.

- 2.2 The following motion was moved by Councillor Robinson and seconded –

‘To elect Councillor Daniel to serve as Vice Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year’.

Voting was by roll call, the votes being cast as follows:

FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF COUNCILLOR DANIEL AS VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillors Cross, Collier, Daniel, Denis, Field, Hilton, Holt, Maples, Murphy, Osborne, Robinson, Rodohan, Scott, Shuttleworth, Swansborough, Taylor, Tutt, Ungar, and Webb.

FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF COUNCILLOR AZAD AS VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillors Azad, Beaver, Belsey, Bennett, Bowdler, Clark, di Cara, Chris Dowling, Claire Dowling, Fox, Galley, Geary, Glazier, Hay, Hollidge, Howell, Kirby-Green, Liddiard, Lunn, Marlow-Eastwood, Maynard, Milligan, Pragnell, Redstone, and Standley.

ABSTENTIONS

Councillors Adeniji, Daniel Shing, and Stephen Shing.

- 2.3 The Chairman declared Councillor Azad elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year. Councillor Azad made a declaration of acceptance of office and took his seat as Vice Chairman.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025

- 3.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the County Council held on 20 March 2025.

4. Apologies for absence

- 4.1 Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Carolyn Lambert, James MacCleary and Brett Wright.

MINUTES

5. Chairman's business

CHAIRMAN'S ACTIVITIES

5.1 The Chairman reported that he had attended a number of engagements since the last County Council meeting, including: a Royal Visit at Newhaven Fort, Lunch with the Lord Lieutenant, Forest Row Parish Council – Meet and Greet, Fundraising Event at Seaford Rugby Club with the Mayor of Seaford, Black Tie and Tiara Charity Ball with the Mayor of Eastbourne, Ashdown Forest Meeting with Mark Pearson, Chief Executive, Spring Tea with Head of Buxted CE Primary School and Seahaven Branch of Royal Society of St George – St George's Day Service followed by refreshments The Chairman also reported that he hosted a Volunteering Networking Event at Hellingly Community Hub.

5.2 The Chairman thanked the Vice Chairman for his ongoing support, including his attendance at Lord Brett McLean's 50th Birthday Charity Fundraising Concert at Pebsham Community Hub, Official switching on Ceremony of SUDwell's new manufacturing equipment (with Lord McLean), Mayor Making Ceremony with Rye Town Council and Mayor (Elect), VE Day Celebrations and Anniversary Tea with Bexhill Town Council, VE Day Celebrations with the Chair of Wealden District Council, Grand Opening of Collington Park Lodge, and a quiz hosted by the Chair of Rother District Council.

PETITIONS

5.3 The following petitions were presented before the meeting by Councillors:

Name of Presenting Councillor	Subject of Petition
Councillor Cross	Stop Stagecoach from changing the 51 service to Eastbourne to hourly from half-hourly.

PRAYERS

5.4 The Chairman thanked Right Revered William Hazlewood, Bishop of Lewes, for leading the prayers before the meeting.

6. Record of Delegations of Executive Functions

6.1 In accordance with the Constitution, Councillor Glazier presented a written record to the Council of the appointment of the Deputy Leader and appointments to the Cabinet, their portfolios and his delegation of executive functions. A copy of the Leader's report is attached to these minutes.

7. Declarations of Interest

7.1 Councillor Holt declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 15 on the agenda, as Leader of Eastbourne Borough Council.

8. Reports

8.1 The Chairman of the County Council, having called over the reports set out in the agenda, reserved the following for discussion:

Governance Committee report – paragraph 1 (Appointment of Members to Committees, Sub-committees, Panels and other bodies).

Cabinet report – paragraph 1 – (Area Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Inspection of East Sussex Local Area Partnership)

People Scrutiny Committee report – paragraph 1 (Call-in: decision made by Cabinet regarding the proposal to close the Linden Court Day Service for people with a learning disability and merge it with Beeching Park day service), paragraph 2 (Call-in: decision made by Cabinet regarding the proposal to reduce the funding for the Housing-Related Floating Support Service)

Standards Committee report – paragraph 1 (Annual report of the Standards Committee)

9. Report of the Governance Committee

Paragraph 1 (Appointment of Members to Committees, Sub-committees, Panels and other bodies).

9.1 Councillor Glazier moved the reserved paragraph, including the revised allocations circulated, of the Governance Committee's report.

9.2 The motion was CARRIED.

10. Appointments to Committees and Sub-Committees

10.1 Councillor Bennett moved, and it was seconded, that appointments be made to the Committees and Sub-Committees, listed in item 8 of the agenda, in accordance with the published list of nominations from political groups.

10.2 The motion was CARRIED.

11. Appointment of Members to other Committees and Panels

11.1 Councillor Bennett moved, and it was seconded, that members be appointed to serve on the Committees and Panels listed in item 9 of the agenda, in accordance with the political balance provisions and the published list of nominations from political groups.

11.2 The motion was CARRIED.

12. Confirmation to the continuation of other bodies

12.1 Councillor Bennett moved, and it was seconded, that the bodies listed in agenda item 10 be continued, that the political balance provisions shall not apply to these Panels and that members be appointed by the Chief Executive as the need arises.

12.2 The motion was CARRIED.

13. Appointment to the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel

13.1 Councillor Bennett moved, and it was seconded, that the political balance provisions would not apply to the membership of the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel and that members be appointed in accordance with the published list of nominations from political groups.

13.2 The motion was CARRIED (with no member voting against).

MINUTES

14. Appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs

14.1 The following motion, moved by Councillor Bennett and seconded, was CARRIED:

To appoint the following members to positions listed below:

Committee	Chair	Vice-Chair
Regulatory	Chris Dowling	
People Scrutiny Committee	Howell	Field
Place Scrutiny Committee	Beaver	Hilton
Audit Committee	Swansborough	Fox
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Belsey	Robinson
Governance Committee	Glazier	
Planning Committee	Liddiard	Lunn
Pension Committee	Fox	
Standards Committee	Belsey	

15. Questions from members of the public

15.1 A copy of the questions from members of the public and the answers from Councillor Claire Dowling, Lead Member for Transport and Environment, and Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health are attached to these minutes. Five supplementary questions were asked and responded to.

16. Report of the Cabinet

Paragraph 1 – Area Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Inspection of East Sussex Local Area Partnership

16.1 Councillor Standley moved the reserved paragraph of the Cabinet's report.

16.2 The paragraph was noted after the debate.

17. Report of the People Scrutiny Committee

Paragraph 1 - Call-in: decision made by Cabinet regarding the proposal to close the Linden Court Day Service for people with a learning disability and merge it with Beeching Park day service

17.1 Councillor Howell moved paragraph 1 of the People Scrutiny Committee report.

17.2 The following amendment was moved by Councillor Tutt and seconded:

The People Scrutiny Committee recommends the County Council to -

MINUTES

☆ consider the matter in relation to the decision made by Cabinet on 25 February to reduce the funding for Linden Court and (delete the following wording) ~~what action if any to take~~ [add the following words] *refer the matter back to the Cabinet setting out the Council's views as set out below.*

The council's views are: Council wishes to thank the parents and carers of the Linden Court community for the work that they have done in surveying the families of the users of this facility and for presenting their findings to Councillors. In light of this information and the possible increase in costs to the Authority should Linden Court close, Council resolves this facility should be kept open pending work with the families, to assess the costs implications and that the outcome of these be reported to Cabinet as part of its reconsideration.

17.3 The amended motion was CARRIED.

Paragraph 2 - Call-in: decision made by Cabinet regarding the proposal to reduce the funding for the Housing-Related Floating Support Service

17.4 Councillor Howell moved paragraph 2 of the People Scrutiny Committee report.

17.5 The following amendment was moved by Cross and seconded.

The People Scrutiny Committee recommends the County Council to -

☆ consider the matter in relation to the decision made by Cabinet on 25 February to reduce the funding for the Housing-Related Floating Support Service and (delete the following wording) ~~what action, if any, to take~~ [add the following words] *refer the matter back to the Cabinet setting out the Council's views as set out below.*

The council's views are:

- *Since the call in by People Scrutiny in March, District's & Boroughs have engaged in dialogue with BHT Sussex regarding contributing towards contract funding – Cabinet should examine these proposals before making a final decision.*
- *Cabinet should give adequate consideration to proposals from BHT Sussex for a reduced service at £2m*

(BHT Sussex who currently provide the service suggested an alternative proposal to reduce the contract value by £2 million (46% reduction) instead of the proposed 88.4%. They have indicated that this would enable 3,500 people to be supported based on the current commissioned service model and noted that further remodelling of the service could further increase the number of people supported and safeguard service quality and successful outcomes.)

- *Given that it is counterproductive to close services that will have to be restarted by the future unitary councils, Cabinet is asked to find funding from reserves to make up the £1m shortfall. (500k already committed by ESCC to continue + 5000k being committed by Ds&Bs + 1m shortfall to make £2m proposal of BHT Sussex)*
- *Given the rises in demand and costs for children's services, we would like the Cabinet to fully assess how cutting the homelessness support would impact the demand for children's services in the short to medium term and how this will affect the budget. (The Children's services team provided an answer to a question from their recent briefing about the impact of homelessness on children's services:*

MINUTES

“Demand for homelessness prevention services is high across East Sussex, some areas of the county report rates of homelessness twice that of the England average. There are currently over 1,200 households living in temporary accommodation. This trend can have a significant negative affect on these households and is also creating an unsustainable financial pressure on the local system.”)

17.6 A recorded vote on the amendment was requested and taken. The amendment was LOST, the votes being cast as follows:

FOR THE AMENDMENT

Councillors Cross, Collier, Daniel, Denis, Field, Hilton, Holt, Maples, Murphy, Robinson, Rodohan, Scott, Daniel Shing, Stephen Shing, Shuttleworth, Swansborough, Taylor, Tutt, Ungar, and Webb.

AGAINST THE AMENDMENT

Councillors Azad, Beaver, Belsey, Bennett, Bowdler, di Cara, Chris Dowling, Claire Dowling, Fox, Galley, Geary, Glazier, Hollidge, Howell, Kirby-Green, Liddiard, Lunn, Marlow-Eastwood, Maynard, Milligan, Pragnell, Redstone, and Standley.

ABSTENTIONS

There were none.

17.7 As the Council had considered the matter and no other proposed courses of action having been tabled, the Chairman moved onto the next item.

18. Report of the Standards Committee

Paragraph 1 – Annual report of the Standards Committee

18.1 Councillor Belsey moved the reserved paragraph of the Standard Committee’s report.

18.2 The paragraph was noted after the debate.

19. Questions from County Councillors

19.1 The following members asked questions of the Lead Cabinet Members indicated and they responded:

Questioner	Respondent	Subject
Councillor Rodohan	Councillor Claire Dowling	Delays to Victoria Place, Eastbourne.
Councillor Murphy	Councillor Standley	Closure of Burfield Academy.
Councillor Tutt	Councillor Claire Dowling	Monitoring of bus service reliability.
Councillor Daniel	Councillor Claire Dowling	Traffic management on the A21.

MINUTES

Councillor Scott	Councillor Glazier	Highway improvement works and impact on businesses in Sedlescombe Road North.
Councillor Stephen Shing	Councillor Claire Dowling	Repainting of single yellow lines.
Councillor Field	Councillor Claire Dowling	Lorries on Battle High Street

20. Urgent decisions

20.1 The Chairman informed the Council of two urgent decisions taken by the Cabinet at its meeting on 20 March, and 22 April 2025 under urgency provisions.

20.2 The report was received and noted.

THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 1.12 pm

The reports referred to are included in the minute book

Delegations approved by the Leader of the Council – 20 May 2025

(a) names of the County Councillors appointed to the Cabinet

The Cabinet comprises the following members

Portfolio	Appointment
Strategic Management and Economic Development	Councillor Keith Glazier
Resources and Climate Change	Councillor Nick Bennett
Economy	Councillor Penny di Cara
Transport and Environment	Councillor Claire Dowling
Adult Social Care and Health	Councillor Carl Maynard
Children and Families (designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services)	Councillor Bob Bowdler
Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	Councillor Bob Standley

(b) the extent of any authority delegated to cabinet members individually as portfolio holders will remain as set out in the [Constitution of the County Council](#) or alternatively hard copies are available at County Hall, Lewes (please contact Member Services – 01273 335089) and below.

In overall terms the areas of responsibility for each portfolio holder includes the following (subject to any subsequent amendment by the Leader at his discretion) principal services to be interpreted broadly. In accordance with the wishes of the Leader, principal services are not to be construed restrictively. In the event of any doubt in connection to a decision made by a Lead Member, the Leader confirms that he has delegated full executive authority to that decision maker:

MINUTES

Portfolio	Scope
Strategic Management and Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairing and managing the executive and its work • Any executive function including overall strategy and policy for the Council • Local Government Reorganisation and Establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority • Principal service area responsibilities: Communications Strategic Economic Planning Policy and Performance Health and Social Care Integration/Health and Wellbeing Board Equalities South East Seven Partnership Transport for South East (SNTB) Member Services <p>all ancillary activities</p>
Resources and Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any executive function including strategy and policy for all corporate resources matters • Principal service area responsibilities: Financial Management Property asset management Risk management Procurement Internal audit ICT Personnel and Training Legal Orbis Coroner services Council lead on Climate Change <p>all ancillary activities</p>

MINUTES

Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any executive function including strategy and policy for all economic development and regeneration and all ancillary activities Principal service area responsibilities Economic Development Culture Skills (shared with Education) all ancillary activities Trading Standards
Transport and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any executive function including strategy and policy for all Transport and Environmental matters Principal service area responsibilities: Operational services Planning and developmental control Transport strategy Archives and records Customer Services Emergency Planning Gypsies and travellers Libraries Registration Services Road Safety Environmental and waste strategy all ancillary activities
Adult Social Care and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any executive function including strategy and policy for all Adult Social Care and Public Health matters Principal service area responsibilities: Services for vulnerable adults including older people, learning disability, physical disability, mental health, public health and all ancillary activities Community Safety Voluntary Sector

MINUTES

Children and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any executive function including overall strategy and policy for all Children's Services (social care) matters Principal service area responsibilities: Child protection and family support Fostering and adoption for children Residential care for children Other aspects of social care for children Youth justice Youth service all ancillary activities
Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any executive function including strategy and policy for all Children's Services (education) matters Principal service area responsibilities: Quality and standards in educational establishments Special educational needs School admissions and transport Early years and childcare School organisation and place planning Skills (shared with Economy) all ancillary activities

(c) appointment to the position of Deputy Leader

Councillor Bennett to be appointed Deputy Leader of the County Council

(d) the terms of reference and constitution of the Cabinet and any executive committees together with the names of cabinet members appointed to them

The terms of reference and constitution of the Cabinet and any executive committees will remain as currently set out in the Constitution of the Council

(e) the nature and extent of any delegation of executive functions to local committees

There is no delegation of executive functions to local committees

(f) the nature and extent of any delegation to officers

MINUTES

The delegations of executive functions to Officers will be as set out in the Constitution. The delegations to Officers can be viewed via the following link:

[Constitution - Delegations to Officers](#) (Part 3 Table 6) or alternatively hard copies are available at County Hall, Lewes (please contact Member Services – 01273 335089)

Urgent Executive Decisions

There were no executive decisions taken during 2024/25 where the making of the decision was agreed in accordance with Regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Councillor Keith Glazier
Leader of the Council

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

MINUTES

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.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1) Question from Councillor Field to Councillor Claire Dowling

Many residents are changing from petrol and diesel to electric vehicles. Whilst investment by local authorities in placing charging points in public car parks is welcomed it is often difficult, if not impossible, for residents without a driveway to charge their cars safely. This includes employees of emergency services who need to charge their cars.

What actions and policies has the County Council put in place to support and encourage residents to implement suitable systems to charge their vehicles at their own homes where they do not have access to a driveway?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The County Council has secured £4.4m of Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding to enable to delivery of on-street chargepoints across the county. It will also lever in private investment, and is expected to deliver approximately 2000 chargepoints at around 300 locations in East Sussex. We will shortly be procuring an on-street chargepoint operator and expect roll out to commence in autumn 2025.

We also want to support residents without access to off street charging and/or nearby chargepoints, so welcome the Governments recent guidance for cross-pavement solutions for charging electric vehicles. [Cross-pavement solutions for charging electric vehicles - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cross-pavement-solutions-for-charging-electric-vehicles). Based on this guidance, we are currently working on developing a policy and licensing process to support this as well as work with manufacturers of cross pavement channels to identify the most suitable and appropriate solutions. In doing so, we will need to consider the risks and technical issues that may be present at each location and how to survey these correctly to identify the potential risks to users of charging channels and those using footways. It is also important to consider how the installation of a single channel may prevent the installation of adjacent channels later due to the minimum physical distance required between installations connected to separate earthing systems.

Once developed, I have asked for the cross-channel pavement policy to be reported to my decision-making meeting for consideration and this will give Councillors the opportunity to comments on the policy's content.

2) Question from Councillor Lambert to Councillor Claire Dowling

A number of Seaford residents have raised concerns about pedestrians walking into Seaford from the Cuckmere Inn along the verge of the A259. Highways are carrying out their statutory duties in maintaining this verge, but it is a verge and not an adopted footpath. Pedestrians using this route therefore do so at their own risk.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that despite the dangers, people are continuing to try to use this as a route into Seaford although there is a safe route over the fields behind the Cuckmere Inn. The problem is exacerbated as the whole area around Exceat and the Seven Sisters is viewed as a pilgrimage route by visitors from South Korea.

This includes overseas visitors walking from East Dean to the coast along the side of the road where there is no path of any kind.

MINUTES

With the continued increase in visitor numbers to this part of the county, will the County Council now take action, in partnership with others as appropriate, to prevent accidents and to encourage visitors to take safe action to protect themselves?

Will the County Council arrange for:

- better signage at either end of the footpaths across the fields, including signage at the A259 end of Cuckmere Lane pointing out the safer route for pedestrians.
- Signage at either end of the bank/verge making it clear this is not a footpath and not suitable for pedestrians.
- better on line information for our visitors raising awareness of the dangers on the cliffs and the roads, including consideration of QR codes in Korean.
- Coverage of safety messages on social media and TikTok, also in Korean.

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Thank you for your written question regarding the issue of pedestrians using the A259 to walk from the Cuckmere Inn into Seaford.

This is a complex matter, and it involves several distinct, but related, areas of County Council work. For example, road safety, highway management, culture and tourism and public rights of way.

Also, there is the need to receive positive support from other stakeholders if the promotion of any alternative off-road routes is to be in some way effective.

Specifically, the South Downs National Park Authority (which owns and manages Seven Sisters County Park) and the Cuckmere Inn would likely need to promote the off-road route. The National Trust (landowner of most of the off-road footpath route) and residents of Chyngton Lane may also have views on the promotion of a route over land they have an interest in.

Many visitors to the area will also use popular apps, such as Google Maps, Instagram or TikTok to plan their visit. This is a difficult area of visitor information to influence. For example, Google Maps identifies the on-road A259 route as this first option for walkers from the Inn to Seaford and only recommends the off-road footpath route if specific details, most likely not known to visitors, are typed into the directions. Another issue is the high number of overseas visitors so, displaying concise and clear signage in languages other than English becomes challenging.

Regarding your four specific requests for action:

- Better signage at either end of the footpaths across the fields, including signage at the A259 end of Cuckmere Lane pointing out the safer route for pedestrians:

This can be investigated by the Rights of Way & Countryside Team. However, while it should be straightforward to provide signage, there may be site specific limitations and it would also be necessary to consult other stakeholders, such as the Cuckmere Inn and National Trust. Signage is not guaranteed to be successful, however, with visitors often preferring to trust a smart phone app for directions. It can also be easily overlooked in a busy location.

- Signage at either end of the bank/verge making it clear this is not a footpath and not suitable for pedestrians.

As mentioned above, Google Maps unfortunately recommends the A259 as a direct walking route, which visitors may be inclined to follow.

The public do also have a right to walk along the A259, and that can only be suspended with a Traffic Regulation Order. (That would include verges and footways within the highway boundary, as is the case here.)

All signs available for use on the public highway are contained within a document produced by the Department for Transport entitled 'The Traffic Signs, Regulations and General Directions 2016'.

Whilst this document allows for informational signage, the only letters that are prescribed for use are the English/Roman alphabet, with other alphabets not permitted.

Whilst we understand tourists could use Google Translate (or a similar translation tool) on their mobile devices to understand English signs, pictorial signs advising of the A259's suitability would be easier to read and would avoid groups of tourists congregating around signage to translate them.

Whilst there is a sign that advises of a prohibition of pedestrians on a section of public highway, it could easily be confused by foreign tourists as one that is permitting and encouraging pedestrians to use the route.

In England, a circular sign with a red border is widely recognised as a prohibition of something, in other countries, this may not be case. (The sign diagram is shown below for reference.) Considering this, the Road Safety team are unable to agree to progressing a Traffic Regulation Order for prohibiting pedestrians on the public highway at this location.



Figure 5-23 Diagram 625.1 (S3-2-22) Pedestrians prohibited

- Better online information for our visitors raising awareness of the dangers on the cliffs and the roads, including consideration of QR codes in Korean:

As detailed above, effective online information is a difficult area to influence, given the various ways visitors chose to plan their journeys. QR codes may be useful on physical signage, although they would need to be relevant visitors from all countries.

- Coverage of safety messages on social media and TikTok, also in Korean:

There is a piece of work, currently being led on by Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC), looking at visits to the whole Beachy Head, Birling Gap and Seven Sisters area. We have also made Experience Sussex, a new visitor economy development programme covering East and West Sussex, aware of the specific Cuckmere Inn/A259 issue. Experience Sussex does have a website and active social media, but, given the plethora

of other information online, this is a difficult area to influence. Additionally, both EBC and Experience Sussex's work is at an early stage.

3) Question from Councillor Murphy to Councillor Claire Dowling

Road Studs (Cat's Eyes) are a safety feature on county rural roads where there is no street lighting. These cats' eyes are an invaluable county asset in guiding the driver along roads in darkness, particularly in rain and fog. Many of these units are wearing out and are not functioning. On our rural roads, road studs are the only night aid there is, apart from carriageway centre white lines. The carriageway centre white lines should aid drivers, but these are also far below a reasonable reflective standard in some areas.

- Is there a scheduled maintenance replacement program when the studs reach the end of their safe working life?
- Do the local highways stewards inspect the condition of cat's eyes at night?
- How can the stewards carry out inspections of road studs safely whilst driving on their own, on high speed roads?
- How is it possible to carry out road stud inspection in daylight?

To give a few examples of road studs missing, the B2124 Laughton Road has only about 10% of road studs working, the A22 from Golden Cross to Forest Row has even less. The A271 from Hailsham to Bexhill is also missing many units, as is the A267 from Hailsham to Tunbridge Wells. There is a patch of road at Fives Ashes that has been resurfaced recently but the road studs have not yet been replaced.

- Is the County Highways Department satisfied that the contractors are fulfilling their contractual obligations in replacing worn out studs?
- If there is a KSI accident and the subsequent police report identifies missing road studs may have contributed to the accident, what liability falls to East Sussex County Council as it is ultimately the Highways Department's responsibility?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Is there a scheduled maintenance replacement program when the studs reach the end of their safe working life?

There is currently no dedicated highway maintenance budget for a scheduled road stud replacement programme. However, the activity is covered as part of East Sussex Highways' revenue-funded reactive / core maintenance programme (only capital when delivered as part of programmed structural maintenance scheme). There is a requirement contained within the Highway Safety Inspection Manual stating that Highway Stewards should be inspecting for missing road studs.

The County Council is currently reviewing its Highway Asset Management Strategy, Policy, and Plans and it is intended to provide clarity on the inspection and maintenance of road studs ensuring greater reference to Well Maintained Highways, Traffic Signs Manual Ch.5, DMRB: Road Layout CS 126 Inspection and assessment of road markings and road studs (formerly TD 26/17).

- **Do the local highways stewards inspect the condition of cat's eyes at night?**

MINUTES

There are no programmed safety inspections carried out at night. If there is a need for an inspection to be undertaken "out of hours" for a specific reason i.e. when traffic volumes are lighter, then this will be accommodated. Nighttime inspections of this nature are currently beyond the scope of the highway maintenance contract.

- **How can the stewards carry out inspections of road studs safely whilst driving on their own, on high speed roads?**

Monthly driven safety inspections are carried out by two Highways Stewards, one driving and one observing the network.

- **How is it possible to carry out road stud inspection in daylight? To give a few examples of road studs missing, the B2124 Laughton Road has only about 10% of road studs working, the A22 from Golden Cross to Forest Row has even less. The A271 from Hailsham to Bexhill is also missing many units, as is the A267 from Hailsham to Tunbridge Wells. There is a patch of road at Fives Ashes that has been resurfaced recently but the road studs have not yet been replaced.**

During a monthly driven inspection (in daytime) the Highway Steward would be able to identify missing studs or those that were visibly damaged. This meets with the requirement of the contract.

With respect to the locations referenced, these have been shared with the Highway Stewards and will be reviewed in the next monthly driven inspection and any remedial works programmed accordingly.

- **Is the County Highways Department satisfied that the contractors are fulfilling their contractual obligations in replacing worn out studs?**

The ESCC Highways Contract Management Group believe that the contractor is carrying out the highway inspections in line with the inspection manual and contract requirements.

- **If there is a KSI accident and the subsequent police report identifies missing road studs may have contributed to the accident, what liability falls to East Sussex County Council as it is ultimately the Highways Department's responsibility?**

Highway authorities have a duty to maintain the highway and ensure it is safe for road users, and this includes appropriate asset management. If a road incident were to occur attributable to missing road studs, this can lead to liability if a dangerous condition results in an accident or injury.

By way of context, Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 places a non-delegable statutory duty on highway authorities to maintain the highway, including making it safe for traffic. If a highway authority fails to properly maintain the highway due to negligence, particularly inadequate asset management, they may be liable for damages caused to road users, including personal injury, property damage, or other losses. A dangerous state of the highway, resulting from a lack of proper maintenance or inadequate asset management, can be the basis for a claim against the highway authority. To establish liability, a claimant would need to demonstrate that the highway was dangerous due to poor maintenance, that the highway authority was negligent in failing to maintain it properly, and that the claimant's losses were a direct result of the dangerous condition.

REPORT OF THE CABINET

The Cabinet met on 24 June 2025. Attendees: -

Councillor Glazier OBE (Chair)

Councillors Bennett, (Vice-Chair), Bowdler, di Cara, Maynard, and Standley

1. Council Monitoring Q4 2024/25

1.1 The Cabinet has considered a report on the Council's position and year-end projections for the Council Plan targets, Revenue Budget, Capital Programme, and Savings Plan, together with Risks at the end of March 2025.

1.2 Broad progress against the Council's four strategic priority outcomes is summarised in paragraph 1.11 and an overview of finance and performance data is provided in the Corporate Summary at Appendix 1. Strategic risks are reported at Appendix 8.

Overview of Council Plan 2024/25 outturns and strategic risks

1.3 We set challenging targets each year that reflect our aim to deliver the best services we can for our local residents and businesses with the limited resources we have available. The ongoing difficult financial position for the Council has meant that services have been working to deliver the priorities within the Council Plan alongside making savings. While our services have had a number of successes over the past year despite this, there are also areas that have experienced challenges. The Departmental Appendices (3-7) provide details of both our achievements and how we are working to improve, where we can, where targets have not been met.

1.4 The overall position at the end of quarter 4 was 43 (72%) of the 60 Council Plan targets had been achieved and 11 (18%) were not achieved. 6 (10%) are carried over for reporting in quarter 1 2025/26. These are measures where the corresponding activity has been completed, but the year-end outturn data is not yet available to report against the target. It should be noted that the percentage of targets met represents an improvement on the year-end position reported in quarter 4 of 2023/24.

1.5 Of the 60 targets, the outturns for 14 (23%) are not comparable with the outturns from 2023/24. Of the remaining 46 measures which can be compared, 14 (23%) improved or were at the maximum (i.e., the most that can be achieved); 4 (7%) remained the same; 22 (37%) had a lower outturn; and 6 (10%) are carried over for reporting in quarter 1 2025/26. Although 22 measures are showing a lower outturn compared with 2023/24, 11 of these met their target for 2024/25. This reflects the difficult decisions we had to make to adjust some targets for 2024/25 based on the resources we had available for this year. This should also be viewed in the context of the results of the inspections and audits that the Council has been subject to, which demonstrate that while we may not always be able to stretch our resources to meet the high ambitions we have for our services, we continue to deliver safe, effective and efficient services.

1.6 The Strategic Risk Register, Appendix 8, was reviewed and updated to reflect the Council's risk profile. Risk 23 (Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution) is new and introduced this quarter. Risk 4 (Health) has an updated risk definition, risk control and risk score. Risk 22 (Oracle) has an updated risk definition and risk control. Risk 1 (Roads), Risk 6 (Local Economic Growth), Risk 9 (Workforce), Risk 15 (Climate), Risk 20 (Placements for children and young people) and Risk 21 (Care Act) have updated risk controls.

Budget Outturn

1.7 The detailed revenue outturns for each department are set out in the relevant appendices which show an aggregate total overspend of £21.9m (£24.8m forecast at quarter 3). The main headlines are:

- Children's Services has an overspend of £13.6m (£15.4m forecast at quarter 3); the main areas of overspend being Early Help and Social Care and Home to School Transport. The Early Help and Social Care overspend of £12.4m (£13.1m forecast at quarter 3) is due in the main to staffing costs within Localities, pressures around agency placements and Children's Homes within Looked After Children, although there was a reduction in net costs at Lansdowne Secure Unit due to increased income from recharging other local authorities for placements.

Home to School Transport has an overspend of £3.8m (£4.2m forecast at quarter 3) due to growth in numbers of pupils and unit costs for transport that have far outstripped what was estimated during the budget setting process. The final overspend has improved since quarter 3 due to legal advice confirming the possibility of charging personal transport budgets for children with Education and Health Care Plans to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant; this meant that £0.6m of transport expenditure could be recharged.

Not included in the figures reported above is the position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which, in accordance with the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2020, is required by local authorities to be carried forward on their balance sheets. As of 31 March 2025, the Council has a cumulative DSG surplus of £2.8m, which is very unusual as most local authorities have significant DSG deficits. However, this will not continue as a forecast cumulative deficit is expected by the end of 2025/26. The statutory override is due to expire in March 2026, which means that any deficit will then be offset against useable council reserves.

- The overspend for Adult Social Care is £10.0m (£9.9m forecast at quarter 3) which largely relates to the Independent Sector, where the overspend is £12.4m. This is due to a combination of factors, primarily being increasing complexity of need and pressures arising from demand and demographic growth returning to pre-pandemic levels. There is an underspend in Directly Provided Services of £2.4m due to staffing vacancies which reflects the impact of savings consultations and underlying difficulties in recruitment.
- There is an underspend of £0.4m (£0.4m forecast overspend at quarter 3) for Business Services. This is due to new grant income, higher than budgeted income for services and reduced costs including staff vacancies, offset by increased accommodation and reactive maintenance costs.
- Communities, Economy and Transport is showing an underspend of £1.3m (£0.9m forecast at quarter 3). This is due to higher than budgeted recycling income and lower Private Finance Initiative contract prices, staff vacancies and slippage on completing Road Safety schemes; offset by an overspend in Highways where the cost of electricity for streetlighting and depots is much higher than budgeted and there was an increase in the number of winter service jobs.

1.8 Within Centrally Held Budgets (CHB), including Treasury Management (TM), and corporate funding there is an underspend of £14.3m (£13.0m forecast at quarter 3), which includes the general contingency:

- There is a £2.6m underspend on TM (£1.6m forecast at quarter 3); a reduced in-year capital borrowing requirement alongside an ongoing strategy to delay borrowing in a falling interest rate environment has meant that the Council has delayed new external borrowing; and returns on investments in year were greater than anticipated as the Base Rate did not fall as fast as originally anticipated. It should be noted that there has been a fall in cash

investment balances; the level of balances has fallen by 43% in one year to £115.3m at the end of 2024/25.

- Within CHB the underspend is now £8.4m; an increase of £1.3m from the forecast at quarter 3 due to the movement in TM and a decrease in the estimated debt impairment for the year. The underspend is mainly due to the TM variance, the General Contingency of £5.3m, and the decision not to transfer a planned £1.3m contribution to the Capital Programme.
- Corporate Funding budgets have underspent by £5.8m (£5.9m forecast at quarter 3). This is mainly due to the allocation of the Social Care Services Grants totalling £5.4m in February 2024, after the 2024/25 budget was set (as approved by Cabinet on 25 June 2024), plus a net additional £0.4m received for business rates 2023/24 pooling and reliefs.

1.9 The net impact of the above is an unplanned draw from the financial management reserve of £7.6m in 2024/25 (a fall from the £11.8m projected at quarter 3). This is in addition to the planned £14.3m draw to present a balanced position in setting the 2024/25 budget. The Council's projected level of strategic reserves was last assessed to be £4.5m as of March 2029; any reduction in unallocated reserves reduces the flexibility available in dealing with the challenge of addressing next year's projected deficit and setting a balanced budget, without having to seek further savings. In this context, to address the projected in-year overspend and reduce the required draw from reserves, the Council took a number of actions to reduce spending in 2024/25, including:

- Additional controls on spending, including the requirement for purchase orders above £1,000 to be supported by a business case and approved by a reviewing board.
- An updated recruitment protocol, including Corporate Management Team approval of non-core role recruitment.
- Reviewing proposed savings for 2025/26 to identify whether actions can be brought forward into 2024/25.
- Asking departments to identify any further actions to reduce in-year spend across all budgets.

1.10 The Capital Programme Outturn net expenditure for the year is £87.0m against a budget of £106.6m. In previous reporting, a slippage risk factor of £20.0m had been applied to the capital programme to reflect likely slippage based on a risk assessment of historic levels of actual expenditure and slippage at a project/programme level. The risk factor was held at a corporate level to enable services / project managers to manage project budgets at a local level, whilst ensuring greater robustness to the overall planning and monitoring process. The net forecast expenditure at quarter 3 after applying this risk factor was £84.6m, so there was a relatively small movement of a £2.4m increase in the final outturn from the quarter 3 forecast.

- The programme outturn slippage is £19.421m against a quarter 3 forecast of £13.7m across several projects, relating to various project specific factors. The largest areas of slippage included: Integrated Transport A22 Corridor (£1.112m); Other Integrated Transport Schemes (£1.033m) Exceat Bridge Replacement (£2.553m); Eastbourne Town Centre Phase 2b (£1.952m); Youth Investment Fund (£1.745m); Schools Capital Building Improvements (£1.033m); IT & Digital Strategy (£2.191m) and IT & Digital Strategy Oracle (£2.622m).
- The programme outturn shows a small spend-in-advance of £0.333m, against a previously forecast £0.4m, mainly relating to: Learning Disability Supported Living (£0.123m) and Broadband additional vouchers (£0.107m).

Progress against Council Priorities

Driving sustainable economic growth

1.11 The Council has spent £382m with 815 local suppliers over the past 12 months. This equates to 60% of our total procurement spend, meeting the target of 60%. £1.8m in Social Value was secured through our Property Frameworks from contracts with a combined value of £11.5m which equates to 16% of the contract value. In total, all applicable contracts in 2024/25 secured 19% of Social Value commitments against a target of 10%. Social Value secured through these contracts included apprenticeship and job opportunities for local people, work experience and career awareness programmes offered to local schools and colleges, and supporting environmental programmes with local groups, schools and colleges (Appendix 4).

1.12 In 2024/25 the percentage of Principal roads requiring maintenance was 5%, against a target of 7%. The percentage of Non-Principal roads requiring maintenance was 6% against a target of 8%. The percentage of Unclassified roads requiring maintenance was 31%, against a target of 25%. A lower figure indicates better road condition. These figures are only available at one point each year, with the results published in quarter 4. They are based on specialist laser surveys undertaken in summer 2024 for Principal and Non-Principal roads, and manual surveys for Unclassified roads which were undertaken in early 2025. The outturns refer to the percentage of road length across the entire county that should be considered for maintenance. The surveys measure road condition in 10m sections. All roads are likely to have a mixture of green, amber and red road condition sections. The road condition outturns reported here are the percentage of 10m sections that should be considered for maintenance, which are classed as red. So, for example, a proportion of 5% indicates that 5% of all 10m sections surveyed of that road type should be considered for maintenance (Appendix 6).

1.13 Work on our highways continued in 2024/25 using the extra funding approved by the Council in recognition of the deterioration of the network following last winter's prolonged, wet and cold weather. We completed 510 patches across 381 sites throughout the year. We replaced, repaired or cleaned 350 road signs and refreshed 683 road markings. We also completed 565 minor road drainage schemes, and 75 larger schemes. 117 road improvement schemes were completed in 2024/25 and over 23,000 potholes were repaired (Appendix 6).

1.14 During 2024/25 over 1,500 students have had the opportunity to go on an Open Doors workplace visit, and over 50 employers have committed to offer the visits. An iCan careers event in March 2025 was attended by more than 400 young people from 34 schools. They had the opportunity to explore career pathways, engage in 6 interactive workshops on employability skills, and connect with representatives from 32 different organisations. The Council continued to help adults improve their numeracy skills through 14 Multiply interventions in 2024/25. 1,300 people were supported as part of the interventions (Appendix 6).

1.15 The Council has delivered business support programmes that helped to create 60 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs in 2024/25, against a target of 45 FTE jobs. 29.5 FTE jobs were created through the first round of the Newhaven Business Grants Programme, 18.5 FTE jobs through the first round of the Rural Business Grants Programme, and 12 FTE jobs through the delivery of specialist business support through the 'Big Ambitions' programme (Appendix 6).

1.16 Final data for the average Attainment 8 score for pupils at state-funded schools was released in quarter 4. Both the average score for all pupils and the average score for disadvantaged pupils were below the targets set for this year (43.1 against a target of 44.0 and 30.1 against a target of 30.5 respectively). The performance of four academies in the Bexhill and Hastings area, where average attainment is lower, impacts significantly on the overall outturn for East Sussex. The young people attending those schools account for approximately one fifth of all secondary pupils in year 11. The average Attainment 8 score of Looked After Children was also below target at 14.7 (target was 19.0) (Appendix 5).

1.17 The percentage of eligible disadvantaged children aged 2 years old who took up a funded place in the spring 2025 funding period was 73%. While this is lower than the national average of 74.8% (the target for this measure), it should be noted that performance appears to have been affected by changes in how the data is reported by the Department for Education (DfE). Some eligible disadvantaged children are now able to access a funded place through the working families funding streams implemented in April 2024, which is reducing the cohort counted through this measure (Appendix 5).

1.18 The 2024/25 percentage of young people who were Not in Education, Employment or Training at academic age 16 was 4.2% against a target of less than or equal to 5%. This is also an improvement on the 2023/24 figure of 4.4%. For academic age 17 the total was 5.7%, against a target of less than or equal to 7%. The 2023/24 figure was 6%. The commissioned advice and support that our Youth Employability Service provides has had a positive impact in supporting young people to access education, employment, and training. We continue to work with the DfE and local colleges to expand the courses available at Level 2 and below. Level 2 courses are generally equivalent to GCSEs and can serve as a pathway to Level 3 courses, apprenticeships, or employment (Appendix 5).

Keeping vulnerable people safe

1.19 The rate of children with a child protection plan was 59.8 per 10,000 children aged 0-17 at year-end, below the target of 64.4. This represents an 11% decrease from the outturn for 2023/24 and reflects the continuing positive impact of the support provided by the Connected Families Intervention Practitioners. The rate of Looked After Children reduced slightly in quarter 4 to 67.3 per 10,000 just above the target of 66.6 (Appendix 5).

1.20 We have met all of the targets linked to waiting times in Adult Social Care included within the Council Plan. This is due to improvements in how cases are triaged and how waiting lists are managed (Appendix 3).

1.21 Trading Standards made 290 active interventions in 2024/25 to protect vulnerable people, exceeding the annual target of 200. 360 businesses received training or advice from Trading Standards in 2024/25, against a target of 350. Trading Standards also seized a significant amount of illegal tobacco and vape products in 2024/25, with tobacco and cigarettes with a genuine retail value of nearly £450,000 and illegal vapes with a genuine retail value of £60,000 seized (Appendix 6).

1.22 A new contract to provide safe accommodation (Refuge) in East Sussex will begin in quarter 1 2025/26. The new provider, Interventions Alliance, will take over the 37 existing units of safe accommodation and provide an additional 18 units within the first 3 months of the contract. The new contract is due to last for 3 years. 6 projects awarded via the Domestic Abuse Small Grants Fund started to deliver services in January 2025. These projects consist of: support for victims / survivors from ethnic minority backgrounds, older people, those in temporary accommodation, and adults with multiple compound needs, as well as child to parent abuse initiatives and whole family approaches (Appendix 3).

Helping people help themselves

1.23 Satisfaction with the 0-19 Early Help Service remained high in 2024/25, with 91% of respondents to our feedback survey agreeing that things had changed for the better as a result of the targeted support they received, above the target of 80% (Appendix 5).

1.24 321 carers were supported through short-term crisis intervention in 2024/25, against a target of 390. Together with the provider and NHS Sussex, we have reviewed the service. The contract has been respecified, and the target has been reduced to 300. This reflects the increased needs of carers and the offer of up to 6, rather than the previous 4, visits (Appendix 3).

1.25 The multi-agency Financial Inclusion programme in East Sussex brings together statutory, voluntary and other partners to improve residents' financial wellbeing and resilience.

The programme delivered a range of benefits during 2024/25. These benefits included distribution of the Household Support Fund, which made 170,000 awards totalling £7m to support households struggling with the cost of bills and essentials. Benefits maximisation campaigns were carried out, which contributed to increases in resident income through benefits of over £1m per year. The 'Additional Measures' grants programme provided additional funding to the money advice sector during the year, reaching over 3000 clients and delivering £2.7m of increased income and debt reduction (Appendix 3).

1.26 In collaboration with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise partners, a new Social Enterprise Development Programme began on 1 April 2025 to provide information, advice and support to residents and assist the Council in meeting its duties under Sections 2 and 4 of the Care Act 2014 including the requirement to prevent, reduce or delay the need for care and support (Appendix 3).

1.27 In February 2025, East Sussex Public Health held our first multi-agency workshop about prevention of gambling-related harm, and there was unanimous support to work together on the development of an action plan. In addition, funding has been secured from the South-East School of Public Health to enable delivery of Wider Workforce Gambling Harms Prevention Training to staff working in organisations across East Sussex (Appendix 3).

Making best use of resources now and for the future

1.28 Throughout 2024/25 corporate lobbying work focussed on using our partnerships and networks at the local, regional and national level to influence policy development in a range of areas, with a focus on the reforms needed in response to growing demand and financial challenges. Significant lobbying in 2024/25, has emphasised the acute need for sustainable resources to meet increasing demand and local government funding reform to ensure the unique needs of the population of East Sussex are recognised and can continue to be met now and in the future. In quarter 4, this included the Council responding to consultations on local authority funding reform and the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, which highlighted that allocations of the new Recovery Grant did not account for population need in East Sussex. The Leader and Chief Executive have continued to actively raise issues and priorities for the county with our local MPs during 2024/25, including, in quarter 4, through specific updates on our Council Plan and budget for 2025/26. This included the Leader meeting, along with group leaders, with a number of East Sussex MPs in quarter 4 to brief them on proposals included in the budget for 2025/26 and ask for their continued support in lobbying Government (Appendix 7).

1.29 We completed 3 energy efficiency schemes in quarter 4, including 2 window replacement projects and one heat decarbonisation scheme. In total, during 2024/25, 20 schemes have been delivered against a target of 23. This reflects cuts to both the Salix Recycling Fund and the ring-fenced Council budget for directly funded carbon saving projects. Energy consumption and carbon emissions are reported a quarter in arrears, so quarter 3 data is the most up to date information. Carbon emissions for quarter 3 were 2% lower than quarter 3 2023/24. If consumption during quarter 4 is similar to previous years, then the reduction compared to the baseline year 2019/20 would be 36%, against a target of 50% (Appendix 4).

1.30 The Council has continued to work both across the organisation and with partners across a range of environment and climate change areas in 2024/25. This included providing environmental advice to client local planning authorities on nearly 2,000 planning applications. We delivered the 40% of the actions in the East Sussex Climate Emergency Road Map 2022 – 2025 which were assigned to the Council. The remaining 60% of actions are assigned to other partners in the Road Map. We have also continued to develop the local nature recovery strategy, which is currently planned to be published by early 2026 (Appendix 6).

1.31 The Council continued with a project to replace the SAP system used for our procurement, finance and Human Resources processes in 2024/25, as this will not be supported from 2027. The Council made good progress on implementing the Oracle Fusion system to replace it. Most of the modules from Phase 1, and all of Phase 2 (which cover most

of the procurement and finance processes) are now live. Phase 3, the final phase of the implementation, will begin to be delivered during 2025/26 (Appendix 4).

1.32 The 2024/25 sickness absence figure (excluding schools) is 9.21 days lost per FTE employee, against a target of 9.10. This is an increase of 0.9% on the 2023/24 figure. The predominant reason for the increase in absence rates is a rise in the number of flu related absences and musculoskeletal related absences (Appendix 4).

1.33 The Council continues to ensure its office hubs are used efficiently and during 2024/25 the space used for staff at County Hall was rationalised and reduced. In quarter 4, the Council vacated both South and East blocks, which involved over 163 teams moving to remaining blocks (Central, North, and West). The vacant blocks are being advertised for office use, marketing commenced in March 2025. The total work on office rationalisation across the corporate estate, including at Eastbourne and Hastings, has provided significant benefits to the Council including £1.050m of financial benefit, reductions in resource required to support ongoing facilities management and maintenance, and reductions in carbon emissions (Appendix 4).

1.34 In December 2024 the Government published its English Devolution White Paper outlining plans to devolve greater powers to newly established Strategic Authorities, alongside a programme for Local Government Reorganisation. The Government invited expressions of interests from upper-tier and neighbouring unitary authorities in joining the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) which would see progress happen at an accelerated pace. In January 2025, following a discussion at Full Council, Cabinet approved a response to Government's invitation which confirmed a commitment to work with partners in West Sussex County Council, and Brighton & Hove City Council to develop a proposal for a Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA). Confirmation was received in February that Sussex was one of six successful areas accepted on to the DPP and expected to undergo reorganisation and devolution at an accelerated speed. In March, following debates at Full Council, Cabinet agreed a response to Government consultation on the establishment of an MCCA in Sussex and agreed an interim proposal for unitary local government in East Sussex developed jointly with district and borough council partners (Appendix 7).

2. Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) - State of the County

2.1 The State of the County report is a key annual milestone in the County Council's Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process, our integrated business and financial planning cycle. The report provides an overview of the current operating context for the Council to begin the process of more detailed planning for 2026/27 and beyond. Alongside the 2024/25 year end monitoring report earlier on this Cabinet agenda, it reflects on our achievements over the last year and the challenges we expect in the year ahead arising from both local and national factors. This analysis helps us start to refine our plans and to guide our business planning and budget setting processes.

2.2 The County Council continues to play a vital role in the quality of life for people across East Sussex. The essential services we provide and commission, and the work we do in partnership with public, voluntary and business sector partners, contribute significantly to improving health and wellbeing, independence, prosperity, connectivity and community across the county. The reach of our services is significant. In the past year our Adult Social Care services have supported over 30,000 people, our Children's Services have been in contact with over 48,000 children and young people, we maintained over 2,000 miles of road, including repairing over 23,000 potholes in our roads and pavements, issued over two million items through our libraries and dealt with a quarter of a million tonnes of waste. The Council

employs 9,912 people (approximately half of these in schools) and spends £382m (60%) with local suppliers, a significant influence in the county's economy.

2.3 We have a strong track record of focusing, within the Council and with our partners, on making best possible use of the collective resources available for the benefit of local people. Over the past year we have been able to invest in extra support for families facing challenges to help them stay together wherever possible, further develop the integration of community health and social care services, and work with partners to publish the Economic Prosperity Strategy for the county and to create new jobs through business support programmes, all of which benefit our residents and communities.

2.4 These valued partnerships and services provide a firm foundation as we approach a period of both sustained challenge for the Council and the most significant change to local government in a generation. The potential devolution of powers from national Government to Sussex and election of a new Mayor in 2026, alongside the proposed reorganisation of local council structures from 2028, would represent reform on a scale not seen since East Sussex County Council (ESCC) came into being. The change on the horizon is considerable and will be a key factor in our planning for the future, but there remain a number of uncertainties, and the future landscape is not yet clearly in our sights. Whilst we anticipate new opportunities in the medium term to progress further transformation and integration of local public services, in the short term it is vital to maintain our focus on the immediate and growing pressures on ESCC services and resources. The financial challenge facing the County Council in the next two years is, once again, unprecedented in its scale as costs have continued to build beyond the resources available to respond. Securing the ability to maintain our statutory duties and continuing to meet the needs of East Sussex residents, particularly the most vulnerable, remain our most pressing priorities.

2.5 As well as significant achievements, the past year has seen the Council forced to take difficult decisions which impact on individuals, communities and partners in order to meet our legal duty to set a balanced budget. Pressures on services have continued to grow as the needs in our communities increase and become more complex, costs have escalated due to national factors beyond our control, and the funding we receive from Government and can generate locally has not kept pace. We expect these pressures to be ongoing in the coming months and years and have a significant impact on planning for the future. The evidence base set out in this report shows how changing demography, needs and national reforms will continue drive future demand for services and support. The gap between the funding we have and the cost of providing statutory services has now grown unsustainably and we have been realistic and honest about the substantial challenges this creates. As always, we will be transparent about the choices we face, including what this may mean for services and the people they support, and we will continue to approach our planning with a sharp focus on what the Council wants to achieve for East Sussex with the limited resources we have.

2.6 This will involve progressing the savings described within the budget set by Council in February which we know are all difficult choices which will have further impacts on our residents, staff and partners. It will mean continuing our focus on approaches which help people stay independent, or avoid the need for more intensive statutory support from ESCC services, wherever we can. We know that the best investment is in the upstream, preventative services which improve outcomes and ultimately make better use of resources and we will continue to make and evidence this argument. However, we do not have sufficient funding to scale up or even maintain these services to the level we would want, or to invest as we would like in the infrastructure and economy of East Sussex for the future. We will also maintain our tight controls on day to day spending and costs. But it is clear that these actions will not be enough to bridge the gap and we will need to consider the further steps needed as we work towards a balanced budget for the coming year.

2.7 This State of the County report contains the usual elements: the demographic evidence base; the national and local policy outlook; and updates on the Medium Term Financial Plan and capital programme. It provides our latest understanding of how we will need to continue to respond to the wide range of policy, demographic and financial drivers which influence the outlook for the Council in the short and longer term.

2.8 We begin our planning for 2026/27 and beyond from the most challenging financial position the Council has ever faced, but also with significant uncertainty about future funding. Government is planning fundamental reforms to the way local government funding is allocated to individual councils, and the recent Spending Review set out a national funding pot for councils which will not grow at the same level as need. Whilst we welcome the national commitments to reducing the number of ringfenced grants and to multi-year funding settlements which will help us plan most effectively, the combination of constrained and redistributed funding increases the likelihood that the Council will not receive the resources required to bridge the financial gap and fund the essential investments we need to make in order to sustain statutory services. The temporary solution of relying on reserves to balance the books, as we have in the past two years, is no longer viable now that these reserves are depleted and the deficits from previous years have accumulated. If the promised multi-year settlement does not provide the funding we need, other avenues will need to be sought. It was agreed earlier in June to commission analysis to inform our options, including the potential to seek Exceptional Financial Support from Government.

2.9 Together with the high level of financial uncertainty, we continue to see locally the ongoing impact of the Covid pandemic and increased cost of living translate into growing need for the statutory, demand-led services for vulnerable children and adults which account for around three quarters of our budget. This, combined with ongoing escalation in costs right across the Council, including in other major statutory services such as highways and transport, have significantly increased the expenditure required to maintain core services. This picture reflects national trends following Covid and cost of living shocks to the economy and society, but has been pronounced here in East Sussex due to demographic make-up and needs of our population, the nature of the local economy and the steps we have already had to take over many years to respond within reduced resources.

2.10 East Sussex is ahead of the national ageing population trend, with over a quarter (26.5%) of the county's population aged 65 or over, compared to 18.7% in England and 19.8% regionally. There are pockets of significant deprivation which also impact on demand, with 78,000 of our residents living in areas amongst the top 20% most deprived nationally. The county differs substantially from the wider south east in this respect. East Sussex offers an exceptional natural environment in which to live and work but this also places limitations on the development and infrastructure which support economic growth, prosperity and the related generation of business rates to help fund services. Earnings are below both the national and regional average and the percentage of people who are unemployed is higher in East Sussex than the south east.

2.11 These national and local factors are also impacting on the Council's key partners, particularly in local government, health and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors. For district and borough councils the impact of increased homelessness and the spiralling costs of temporary accommodation has a major impact on resources, and national reforms to planning, housing and waste are significant. For the local NHS, demographic changes and increased complexity of need, coupled with the Covid legacy and major national reforms, impact demand and resources, with implications for working with Adult Social Care and Children's Services. For VCSE partners increased vulnerability in our communities and stretched public services mean more local people seeking support, alongside increased funding challenges as a result of higher costs. In this context, working

together to target resources and sustain support as effectively as possible is more important than ever.

2.12 Taking every step we can locally to manage demand and reduce costs continues to be an ongoing discipline. However, the scope for more efficiency gains is now very limited and national support is vital. This report sets out our approach to proactive lobbying and communications to ensure that the Government is aware of the needs of our county, the urgent requirement for sustainable funding that appropriately reflects local need, and the case for fundamental national reform in key areas to enable more flexible and targeted use of the resources we have.

2.13 It continues to be critical that we focus ESCC resources, in partnership with others, in the most effective way to support our priorities and the provision of statutory services. The Council spends over £1.1bn gross each year (in the region of £580m net) on services for the county's residents and businesses. We continue to use our robust RPPR process to ensure our financial and other resources are aligned to delivery of our priority outcomes and that we are informed by a clear understanding of our effectiveness. This report describes the range of action we are already taking and outlines further steps we will need to take to bridge the financial gap if additional national support is not forthcoming.

Current Position

2.14 A range of national factors have continued to impact on the county over the past year, leading to ongoing pressures on households. The heightened cost of living has persisted, with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, the complexity of need amongst vulnerable children, families and adults has continued to grow, and population changes have also led to increased need. These pressures have manifested locally in ongoing growth in demand for County Council services, reinforcing the importance of the role the Council plays for the residents, communities and businesses of East Sussex. Our assessments of the impact of the national and local operating context on future levels of service demand continue to be refined and the latest modelling will be built into our planning.

2.15 As we develop our medium and longer term plans we will also need to factor in the broader context in which we will be working. As it approaches the end of its first year in office, the Government is pursuing a wide range of fundamental reforms to key services with more anticipated in the coming months. Many of these reforms have major impacts for our services, requiring a significant policy and operational response at a time of limited resources and uncertainty about the funding available to support change and transition. The national and local context includes:

- The developing national and international economic outlook, including considerable economic uncertainty. Inflation has fallen from previous heights but has recently increased and remains above target, impacts from the increased cost of living persist, economic growth remains limited and public finances continue to be strained. The ongoing pressures on households are likely to continue to influence demand for our services and the costs of providing services will also continue to increase.
- Considerable uncertainty over the future of local government funding. The long-planned funding review, covering the formula on which funding allocations to individual local authorities are based, is underway and will inform a multi-year financial settlement from 2026/27. With the review's outcomes and any transitional arrangements unclear, and indications of a shift of funding towards concentrated areas of deprivation in urban centres, there are considerable risks for East Sussex. In addition, national service reforms in Children's Services and a lack of clarity on funding arrangements for Adult Social Care (see below) carry considerable financial risks for local authorities.

- Structural change in local government initiated by the English Devolution White Paper. Locally, this will see the potential creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for Sussex and a single tier of local government in East Sussex, with associated opportunities and risks for the Council and the county, as well as the potential for wider public service reform.
- Potential further changes to arrangements for driving economic growth locally as some functions currently undertaken by upper tier authorities could transition to a Sussex MCCA, along with additional powers devolved from Government. Harnessing the benefits of additional investment and opportunities for the county through these developments, Levelling Up Partnerships and the Plan for Neighbourhoods will be vital.
- Major national reforms in children's social care and education requiring a significant local response from the Council and partners, alongside ongoing work to respond to increasing complexity of need and challenges in securing suitable care placements. Significant reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities system are also anticipated in the coming months.
- Uncertainty in relation to plans to reform the Adult Social Care system, particularly future funding arrangements which remain unclear. Significant national reforms in the NHS are also impacting local health partners and have implications for how we work together. We are also continuing to respond to a range of significant local pressures in health and social care and taking forward a range of work to manage demand and improve outcomes.
- Significant national policy developments related to planning, infrastructure and transport, including the reintroduction of strategic spatial planning, potential changes to transport planning under proposed devolution arrangements and significant reforms to public transport. We are also taking forward our agreed Local Transport Plan and its supporting plans, the next stages of our Bus Service Improvement Plan, and a number of local infrastructure projects.
- Delivering new duties arising from the Environment Act, including in relation to biodiversity, nature recovery, waste and recycling. We will also look for opportunities to draw investment into East Sussex through Government plans in areas such as clean energy, and to define the current and future role for local authorities in Sussex in addressing climate change, to work most effectively alongside new national and local structures that are emerging.
- Ongoing challenges in the labour market, including the impact of workforce shortages and recruitment and retention challenges, ongoing pay negotiations and the need for our workforce to adapt to service reforms. We will also need to consider the impact of significant national employment reforms. Alongside this, the need to take advantage of new opportunities from rapidly developing advances in technology and artificial intelligence which may support capacity and efficiency.
- The ongoing need to respond to a complex picture of migration in light of global conflicts, increased numbers of people seeking asylum, including unaccompanied children, and developments in national policy on immigration.
- Renewing work with our voluntary, community and social enterprise Sector (VCSE) partners to maximise capacity to build community health, wellbeing and resilience as part of our ongoing activity to help people help themselves.

- The ongoing importance of all our partnerships in harnessing the collective resources and assets available within the county for the benefit of our communities, particularly in the context of financial pressures.

2.16 The local and national policy outlook at Appendix 10 sets out the latest position on these and other current issues, and plans will continue to develop over the summer and autumn as more information emerges. As always, Members will continue to be updated on policy developments throughout the RPPR cycle.

2.17 To address the unsustainable financial position we have taken every possible step including instituting strict spending and recruitment controls, reprioritising spend, reducing our office estate and maximising income. We have reviewed and reduced our capital programme to minimise the need for borrowing, which means we are not able to invest to the level we would want in other important areas, such as the roads which support the county's economy and communities and our response to the climate emergency. Without the capacity in the budget to support borrowing to invest for the future, we have been forced to scale back our plans in these and other areas to match only the grant funding we receive. We have reviewed the value for money our services provide, ensuring they perform well against our nearest comparator authorities and that we adopt good practice elsewhere where we can. External assessment has confirmed that the Council continues to provide good value for money, is efficient and well-run. We are introducing and testing further digital and artificial intelligence approaches and systems which benefit both service delivery and capacity.

2.18 Where it is feasible within available resources we have pursued preventative or upstream approaches which improve outcomes and manage demand, supporting people and communities to be independent wherever possible. This includes a transformation programme in Children's Services focused on securing the right placements for children and delivering national reforms to social care support for families, and the further integration of community health and care services and development of a prevention strategy in Adult Social Care and Health. The delivery of additional patching, drainage and lining works through Cabinet's previous additional investment in highways maintenance has supported the future resilience of the roads which the local economy and our communities depend on. However, there is a lack of funding for the scale of investment required in preventative work across a range of areas which would reduce the need for more intensive support in the future. As resources for this work have become increasingly constrained over time, services have become necessarily focused on responding to the most critical needs, creating a negative cycle of growing demand and increased costs.

2.19 We have taken the additional and significant steps of bringing forward further difficult service reductions and drawing on service reserves to balance the budget. However, despite all the action we have taken, fundamentally there remains a large gap between the income we currently expect to receive in the coming years and the costs of providing services. Without further Government support, changes to the statutory requirements local authorities are expected to fulfil, or more funding for the county as a result of reform of local government finances we will not have the funding we need for the future. Further detail on the financial outlook and proposed next steps is provided at paragraph 2.26.

2.20 In all our activities, and in planning for the future, the County Council will continue to work to our guiding principles that:

- We are effective stewards of public money and deliver good value for money through strong integrated business planning;
- Our activities are transparent and we can be held to account;
- We operate as One Council and focus on agreed priority outcomes;

- We prioritise the investment available for front line service delivery and maximise the resources available, including work to secure sustainable national funding and partnerships with other organisations;
- We carry out all we do professionally and competently;
- We remain ambitious and realistic about what can be achieved with the resources available; and
- We strive to be a good employer and partner.

Demographic, Economic and Demand Changes

2.21 Appendix 9 sets out the key factors affecting the county in relation to demography, deprivation, health, housing, the environment and economy, and the impact these are having on demand for our services. This contains more detail on the issues outlined in paragraph 2.14. Appendix 9 highlights some of the longer-term challenges we face related to the nature of our population and our geography alongside emerging issues. While some factors impact on residents across the county, such as the ongoing challenges around cost of living, each local area is different and some are impacted more by particular issues. In addition, some of our communities are impacted by multiple systemic issues that require additional support to address. This has been recognised by the awarding of Levelling Up funding to these areas, and more recently being identified as eligible places for Plan for Neighbourhoods funding.

2.22 The main factors highlighted by the report are:

- **Older People** – the latest population projections show that the number of over 65s in the county will continue to grow at a much faster rate than our working age population; we are expecting an increase of 9.5% in the 65-84 age group and an increase of 18.3% in the over 85 age group in the next four years. Proportionately we have high numbers of over 65s and over 85s which has an impact on the demand for services and the Council's finances. Rother has the joint highest percentage of the population aged 85 years and over in the country.
- **Children and Young People** – there are still higher levels of demand for children's social care and more complex cases than seen pre-pandemic which together have resulted in a higher number of child protection cases. The number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) continues to increase year on year, which is leading to an increased demand for home to school transport provision.
- **Economy** – economic productivity within the county remains lower than the national average. Average wages for those employed within the county also remain lower than the national average. The unemployment rates in Hastings and Eastbourne are higher than the national average.

Council Priority Outcomes

2.23 The Council's business and financial planning is underpinned by our four priority outcomes, which provide a clear focus for decisions about spending and savings and direct activity across the Council.

2.24 The current four priority outcomes are:

- Driving sustainable economic growth;
- Keeping vulnerable people safe;
- Helping people help themselves; and
- Making best use of resources now and for the future.

The priority outcome that the Council makes the "best use of resources now and for the future" is a test that is applied to all activities to ensure sustainability of our resources, both in terms of money and environmental assets. It ensures that the future impact of the choices we make

about using resources is actively considered across all that we do, as well as the here and now.

2.25 The priority outcomes, and their subsidiary delivery outcomes, are reviewed annually to ensure they continue to reflect the current context. Updates have been made in recent years to ensure the priorities we are working to deliver, and the way we measure the performance of our activities and services, reflect the current operating context. Following these recent updates, it is considered that the current priority and delivery outcomes, as set out at Appendix 11, remain appropriate and Cabinet is recommended to agree these as the basis for future business and financial planning.

Medium Term Financial Plan

2.26 When the 2025/26 balanced budget was approved by Full Council on 11 February 2025, the deficit on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to 2027/28 was £56.2m. Updating the MTFP for normal factors (such as the latest inflation rates and an additional year), the position is an increased deficit by 2028/29 of £70.8m.

2.27 On 11 June the Chancellor published the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) – the first spending review of the current Parliament. The CSR announced a 2.6% real terms increase in local government core spending power, although this largely comes from increased Council Tax, which will retain the 3% core referendum principle and 2% for the Adult Social Care precept. The CSR did not publish any information on likely allocations, which will be subject to the outcome of the Government's funding reform consultation. The Government's intention to use funding reform to target funding based on deprivation creates risks that redistribution will impact negatively on the Council's future financial position.

2.28 The MTFP as set out below assumes continuation of current funding. However, the detail within the Comprehensive Spending Review, funding reform consultation and business rates reset, together with a multi-year settlement are all likely to impact on the future deficit. The Council will be required to set a further two balanced budgets in 2026/27 and 2027/28, prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2028/29.

Medium Term Financial Plan	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29* £m
Annual Budget Deficit / (Surplus)	25.089	18.084	16.175
Carry Forward of 2025/26 Deficit	11.449	-	-
Annual Budget Deficit / (Surplus) after Carry Forward	36.538	18.084	16.175
Total Budget Deficit / (Surplus)	36.538	54.622	70.797

*Notional due to LGR

2.29 The Council has recognised ongoing service pressures in Adult Social Care and Children's Services and invested £51.1m in 2024/25 with a further £54.9m in 2025/26 required when the budgets were set. Whilst the 2025/26 Local Government Financial Settlement saw an increase in grant funding to the Council including a £8.9m increase in the Social Care Grant and a £1.5m allocation of Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, there was the loss of £0.5m Services Grant, plus the Council did not receive an allocation from the new £600m Recovery Grant, where allocations were specifically targeted to meet need and deprivation, particularly in non-shire authorities. Overall, the additional funding was not at a level sufficient to fund the investment, and the Council still required a significant draw on reserves of £11.4m in 2025/26.

2.30 The use of reserves to mitigate budget deficits is not sustainable as they can only be used once. The current level of reserves is set out in the table below. Total strategic reserves are projected to be £4.5m by 2029, which excludes any additional draws required to balance budgets in 2025/26 or beyond. This compares with a cumulative deficit of £70.8m by 2028/29:

Reserves Balances	1 Apr 2025 £m	Estimated 1 Apr 2026 £m	Estimated 1 Apr 2029 £m
Earmarked Reserves:			
Held on behalf of others or statutorily ringfenced	25.5	22.5	21.4
Named Service Reserves			
Waste Reserve	19.8	14.7	7.4
Capital Programme Reserve	9.1	5.2	0.0
Insurance Reserve	7.7	5.7	5.5
Local Government Reorganisation Reserve	0.0	4.2	0.0
Subtotal named service reserves	36.6	29.8	12.9
Strategic Reserves			
Priority Outcomes and Transformation	5.2	4.6	2.0
Financial Management	11.3	4.6	2.5
Subtotal strategic reserves	16.5	9.1	4.5
Total Earmarked Reserves	78.6	61.5	38.8
General Fund Balance	10.0	10.0	10.0
TOTAL RESERVES	88.6	71.5	48.8

2.31 Planning scenarios will be considered which may impact the overall deficit, as set out in the table below.

	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29* £m	Total £m
Revised deficit	36.538	18.084	16.175	70.797
Scenarios currently being considered				
Continuation of Council Tax flexibility: <i>Add a further 3.00% to our current 1.99% assumption to get to 4.99% (2.99% plus 2.00% ASC Precept) for 2026/27</i>	(11.894)	(0.420)	(0.433)	(12.747)
Deficit/(surplus) after scenarios	24.644	17.664	15.742	58.050

*Notional due to LGR

2.32 The CSR confirmed that the Council Tax referendum limit would continue to be 5% (a 2% Adult Social Care precept and 3% for other services). If the Council raised Council Tax by 4.99% there would remain a cumulative deficit of £58.1m by 2028/29. With regard to possible funding scenarios, the Government has been clear that deprivation will play a much bigger part in determining the allocation of funding. There is concern that the measures used to

define 'need and deprivation' will favour urban councils, while shire councils such as ESCC will lose out. This could be particularly challenging for East Sussex, which has higher levels of deprivation and need than neighbouring authorities.

2.33 Given the forecast level of strategic reserves is £4.5m by March 2029, which excludes any draws necessary to mitigate future deficits, and that all other avenues have been explored, the Council will have to consider balancing the 2026/27 budget from the following options:

- Further savings and service reductions, which could have a significant impact on local residents given the savings that have already been delivered.
- Use of remaining reserves, which would leave the Council unable to manage emergent financial pressures.
- Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to fund the deficit - EFS is not 'free' money to the Council as it would involve either borrowing and/or increasing Council Tax above the referendum limit. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) look to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to provide assurance for any EFS requests. CIPFA has been commissioned to undertake the required financial assurance review in anticipation of having to approach MHCLG for EFS.

2.34 None of the above options are desirable but the Council will have no option but to undertake some combination of the above if it is to maintain financial sustainability and protect services to the residents of East Sussex, as we move towards the reorganisation of local government.

Savings

2.35 The 2025/26 balanced budget and MTFP agreed by Council in February already includes planned savings of £16.2m. Following on from over £140m in savings delivered since 2010, these savings are very challenging to deliver and will have significant impacts on our residents, staff and partners. They also mean that it has not been possible to sustain all services at Core Offer levels - the basic but decent level of services residents should expect. However, in light of the serious financial position the Council faces, and the very limited options remaining, it is recommended that officers explore areas of search for further savings and service reductions across all departments to reduce the financial gap.

2.36 Given the need for any savings to take effect as early as possible to impact on the 2026/27 financial position, areas of search will be brought forward for Member consideration at the earliest opportunity.

Capital Programme

2.37 The approved programme has now been updated to reflect the 2024/25 outturn and other approved variations, revising the gross programme to £724.1m to 2033/34. The details are set out in Appendix 12, together with the revised programme.

2.38 The 10 year capital programme to 2034/35 and 20 year Capital Strategy 2025/26 to 2045/46 will be updated as part of the RPPR process over the autumn to add an additional year and ensure continued links into, and support of, the Council's other strategies.

Lobbying and Communications

2.39 This report sets out the range of significant demand, policy and financial issues which must be addressed in our planning for the future. The outlook is highly challenging - we face a significant financial gap and very limited and undesirable options open to the Council in responding to this. There is also continued uncertainty in relation to national reforms in major service areas, ongoing growth in need and a lack of clarity on future funding arrangements. At the same time, similar pressures are affecting many of our key partners, affecting the work we

do together to improve outcomes for local people, and we are working with local government partners to plan and deliver major structural change.

2.40 These are substantial risks and planning in this context is very complex. It is clear however, that without further Government support, the financial outlook will require difficult decisions in the short term and that these will not be the decisions we would choose to make to address growing demands or to support transition to future organisations.

2.41 Through our lobbying, we will make clear to the Government the requirement for sustainable funding for local government as a whole, additional support to deliver national reforms and that the specific local needs of East Sussex must be appropriately reflected in new funding arrangements. We will highlight that opportunities for efficiencies and service transformation arising from structural change can only be fully harnessed if underpinned by the robust and sustainable services that East Sussex residents, businesses and communities need. This includes opportunities to continue positive preventative work that could most effectively manage future demand for services.

2.42 We will continue to work with local, regional and national partners to make this case through all available avenues and seek the support of East Sussex MPs in highlighting the needs of our county and the key role the Council has to play in improving the quality of life for local people.

Next Steps

2.43 Work will continue over the summer to refine our understanding of the medium term impacts on our services of national reforms, changing demand for services and the financial resources that will be available to us in the coming years. We will also develop proposals for closing the financial gap.

2.44 We will report back to Members in the autumn with an updated assessment of our service demand, funding expectations and proposed actions to inform more detailed business and budget planning for 2026/27 and beyond. We will use our RPPR process to plan for the future as best we can in the context of the considerable uncertainty we face.

2.45 Members will continue to be consulted on plans as they are developed through Cabinet, County Council, Scrutiny Committees, Whole Council Forums and specific engagement sessions throughout the 2025/26 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process.

24 June 2025

KEITH GLAZIER, OBE
(Chair)

This page is intentionally left blank

NOTICE OF MOTION – PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

MOTION WORDING

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted by Councillor Taylor, and seconded by Councillor Denis:

East Sussex has a significant number of nature protected areas including National Landscapes, and National and Local Nature Reserves (see Annex 1), that are essential for the local ecosystem survival and for carbon sequestration (of national relevance) and the survival of seriously endangered insects, wildlife and plant life. This Council does not accept the current Part 3 of the new Bill and will do everything we can to ensure our essential protected areas do not get destroyed by development.

This Council calls on the Leader to write to the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Angela Rayner MP and the Right Honourable Steve Reed, to request:

- That Part 3 of the Bill is withdrawn (or, if not, accept substantial amendments to improve protection and regeneration of nature in this part)
- That positive proposals for nature are added to other parts of the Bill
- Assurance that East Sussex nature protected sites remain fully protected

This Council also request that the Leader of the Council to write to our local MPs asking them to support amendments to the bill that address the concerns outlined above and below in Annex 2 and, in the event that the bill remains substantially the same, to call on our MPs to vote against its adoption on the grounds that it will set back nature recovery whilst failing to help deliver either truly the affordable housing or the social housing local people need.

MOTION BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Planning & Infrastructure Bill that is currently going through Parliament which will change the way planning rules address environmental protection and recovery.

We note the opinion of the Town and Country Planning Associations; that “*The Planning and Infrastructure Bill could be the platform for the delivery of healthy communities designed to enhance nature and secure healthy and resilient homes. However, to achieve that goal the legislation requires significant amendment.*”

The Bill introduces a "Nature Restoration Fund" where money from developers will pay for nature recovery via "Environment Delivery Plans" (EDPs). This *could* be an excellent idea if done properly. It chimes with the "polluter pays" principle. It *could* deliver strategic, landscape scale "bigger, better, more, joined-up" nature restoration.

However leading conservationists and wildlife experts say that the way the bill is written won't bring in the finance needed or deliver for nature.

The Wildlife Trusts and other environmental organisations have repeatedly highlighted that the current drafting of Part 3 of the Bill ('Development and nature recovery') would lead to a significant weakening in environmental protections. On 1st May, the Government's own nature watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) published advice to MHCLG which concurred with this analysis and warned that Part 3 would 'have the effect of reducing the level of environmental protection provided for by existing environmental law' and therefore constitutes regression¹.

¹ OEP [advice letter](#), 1st May 2025

The Wildlife Trusts have concluded that this part of the Bill is not a good faith attempt to balance nature and development needs. It is rather a Bulldozer designed to weaken environmental protections, all to solve a perceived nature delay problem for developers. Evidence published this May demonstrate that this problem does not actually exist².

The kind of development that has predominated in this area has been mainly for the financial gain of developers, and not for the good of local people. Housing for people on low incomes is still scarce and yet expensive homes are built for those who have income to buy in the current market. Second homes and holiday lets are crowding out local people, whilst social housing numbers barely increase. Polling by YouGov found people are three times more likely to want the government to build more social housing than encouraging developers to build more private homes.

So, this bill does not deliver homes for those who need it and at the same time risks further depletion of nature by unnecessary building for the high consuming wealthy people, in this country, one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Are we going to let this happen on our watch in East Sussex?

Annex 1: (non-exhaustive) List of nature protected sites in East Sussex

National Nature Reserves (NNR):

- Rye Harbour NNR: A coastal area with a diverse range of habitats, including saltmarsh, mudflats, and grazing marsh, supporting a wide variety of bird, plant, and invertebrate species.
- Castle Hill NNR: A chalk hill with a mix of grassland and woodland habitats.
- Lewes Downs (Mount Caburn) NNR: A chalk hill with a mix of grassland, woodland, and wet meadow habitats.
- Lullington Heath NNR: A heathland area with a mix of heather, gorse, and birch woodland.
- Pevensey Levels NNR: A coastal wetland area with a mix of saltmarsh, mudflat, and reedbed habitats.

Local Nature Reserves (LNR):

- Arlington Reservoir LNR: A reservoir with diverse birdlife and other aquatic species.
- Eastern Road LNR: A small, diverse site with meadows, woodland, and wetland areas.
- Hastings Country Park LNR: A large area of woodland and grassland with a variety of wildlife.
- Marline Valley Woods LNR: A mix of semi-natural ancient woodland, unimproved meadows, and a ghyll stream.
- Ouse Estuary LNR: A coastal wetland area created to conserve wildlife and provide flood management.
- Waterhall LNR: A 90-hectare area of grassland and woodland with diverse birdlife.

Other Protected Areas:

- Ashdown Forest: National Landscape. One of the largest areas of lowland heath in England, with diverse habitats and wildlife.
- South Downs National Park as a whole, but including Seven Sisters Country Park, a large area of chalk cliffs, grassland, and woodland with diverse wildlife.

² <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Planning%20%26%20Infrastructure%20Bill%20-%20Report%20stage%20briefing%20-%202003.06.25%20version.pdf>

- Beachy Head: A chalk cliff with views of the coastline and diverse birdlife.
- Sussex Wildlife Trust Reserves: A network of smaller reserves, including Eridge Rocks, Burton and Chingford Ponds, and Woods Mill, protecting specific habitats and species.

Annex 2: Particular concerns with the Bill to include in the letter

- By proposals that replace the “mitigation hierarchy”: avoid, minimise, mitigate, offset, which currently applies with an approach which jumps directly to the most expensive and least successful option: offsetting.
- At the proposed stripping away of current environmental protections (as the current Habitat Regulations, etc, will no longer apply in those areas that have an Environment Delivery Plan, EDP)
- That there is no requirement to protect irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodland or chalk streams.
- That local people will have no input into plans that will affect their area: EDPs have to go through consultation, but only with public bodies.
- That developers will be able to challenge the level of the Nature Restoration Fund levy purely on the grounds of ‘viability’ rather than on the grounds of ‘costs and benefits’ - effectively prioritising profit over environmental protection and recovery.
- That there are no mechanisms or criteria in place to measure ‘overall improvement’ - the required standard for EDPs - rendering ministerial sign-off of them almost meaningless.
- That the bill fails to adequately address mitigation and adaptation measures for our changing climate, missing the opportunity to adequately address embedded carbon, overheating risk and flood risk in development, and to ensure the Climate Change Committee and the Office for Environmental Protection are consulted in the preparation of EDPs .
- That the bill negates the current requirement for developers to conduct site based ecological surveys to evaluate species and habitat impacts. Without this data, it is impossible to assess the scale and nature of necessary mitigation, or to determine if the development has resulted in a breach of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981.
- The Bill creates a greater role for governmental bodies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency in the development and application of Delivery Plans, but these agencies have already suffered defunding and struggle to deliver their most basic responsibilities.
- The Bill appears to green light the removal of nature where it is in conflict with development and in the longer term will result in the creation of dead zones.

Council further notes;

- That the bill fails to enshrine clear targets for ‘affordable’ and social housing in either local or national plans. Nor does it address the inadequacies of current definitions of ‘affordability’.
- That the bill fails to address ‘land banking’ with measures to penalise developers that fail to build out sites with planning permission.
- That the bill fails to enable councils to purchase land for social housing development without paying unjustified premiums simply because of council plans to build homes.

This page is intentionally left blank

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at County Hall, St. Anne's Crescent, Lewes BN7 1UE at 10:30 hours on Thursday, 12 June 2025.

Councillors Evans (Chair), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Asaduzzaman, Azad, Dowling, Geary, Goddard, Hill, Lyons, Maples, Marlow-Eastwood, O'Quinn, Osborne, Pragnell, Redstone, Scott, and Ungar

The agenda and non-confidential reports can be read on the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service's website at <http://www.esfrs.org/about-us/east-sussex-fire-authority/fire-authority-meetings/> A brief synopsis and the decisions relating to key items is set out below.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

- 1.1 Members resolved to appoint Councillor Amanda Evans as Chair of the Fire Authority for the year 2025/26.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON

- 2.1 Members resolved to appoint Councillor Carolyn Lambert as Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority for the year 2025/26.

3. POLITICAL REPRESENTATION ON THE PANELS OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

- 3.1 The Authority received a report seeking to secure political balance on its Panels in accordance with the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 and agree to the resultant Membership to the Panels of the Fire Authority.

- 3.2 The Fire Authority was required to keep under review the allocation of seats on Committees and other bodies to ensure, so far as practicable, that they reflected the political groups on the Authority. The rules governing this representation were outlined in the report. There remained four political groups on the Fire Authority and the political make-up was:

Conservatives	7
Labour	5
Liberal Democrat	3
Green	2
Independent	1

- 3.3 The Panels are the Authority's committees, set up in accordance with Standing Order 41, and their terms of reference are shown in the Constitution. The size of each Panel is not constituted but agreed by the Fire Authority. To ensure each Panel was representative of the overall membership of the Fire Authority it was agreed that the size of each Panel remain at 7 members.

- 3.4 There was a discussion on the proportionality figures from the constituent bodies, the calculations involved and the legislation, referenced in the body of the report, which dictated how these figures were reached. Confirmation had been sought and received from East Sussex County Council that their allocation to the Fire Authority was properly calculated and, whilst there was interest in future allocations, Members were reassured that the figures had been properly calculated in accordance with the regulations governing political proportionality.
- 3.5 The Authority agreed appointments to each Lead Member Role. The Membership of each panel was confirmed at the meeting. The Authority confirmed the Panel arrangements, political representation, and membership of each panel. They agreed that the political balance provisions shall not apply to the membership of the Principal Officer Appointments Panel. The Authority appointed Cllr Paul Redstone as Chairperson of the Policy & Resources Panel and Cllr Peter Pragnell as Chairperson of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel in accordance with Standing Order 41.13 and that the remaining Panels would appoint a chairperson at their first meeting under Standing Order 41.14.

4. FIRE AUTHORITY AND PANEL MEETINGS 2025 AND 2026

- 4.1 The Fire Authority received and noted the dates of meetings of the Fire Authority and Panels through until its meeting in December 2026.

5. TREASURY MANAGEMENT – STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2024/25

- 5.1 The Fire Authority received the Annual Treasury Management Stewardship Report, a requirement of the Fire Authority's reporting procedures, informing Members of Treasury Management performance and compliance with Prudential Indicators for 2024/25. The Authority had complied with its approved Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators for the year.
- 5.2 The Bank of England base rate was cut on three occasions during 2024/25 from 5.25% to 4.50%. A further series of cuts was anticipated into 2025/26. The average rate of interest received in 2024/25 through Treasury Management activity was 5.08% reflecting the Authority's continuing prioritisation of security and liquidity over yield. The Authority was informed that no new borrowing had been undertaken and three loans totalling £0.402m were repaid during the year, with total loan debt outstanding being £9.015m as at 31 March 2025 and the average interest rate was 4.48%.
- 5.3 Decisions on investment had been taken in the context of the prevailing economic climate, the approved capital programme, and the requirement to fund it over the medium term. No investment in longer duration funds was made. The economic environment continued to evolve rapidly and was summarised by MUFG, Treasury Advisors, at Appendix 1 to the report. Opportunities were being explored to secure investment returns within the acceptable risk parameters set out in the Authority's agreed Strategy. The Authority had invested in fixed term deposits to 'ladder' maturities in a falling interest rate environment. Investments can be placed to Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) funds that meet the Authority's policy criteria for security and liquidity and when they offer comparable or better returns than similar non ESG funds. There had been no suitable opportunities during the year, but the Authority had made greater use of the Local Authority market to invest short term.

- 5.4 There was a lengthy discussion regarding the potential financial impact to the Authority of the Government's Devolution programme, accepting that at this stage there remained insufficient information for there to be any detail, Officers reassured Members that they were involved in discussions with other affected Authorities and would provide an update when there was more known. The Authority discussed its concerns that there had been no mention of Fire at all in the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. Members were keen to see Government ringfence Fire funding as part of the Devolution programme and would continue to support all lobbying efforts. The Authority agreed to note the Treasury Management performance for 2024/25.

COUNCILLOR AMANDA EVANS
CHAIR OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

12 June 2025

This page is intentionally left blank