

Meeting of
East Sussex County Council
on Tuesday, 2 December 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

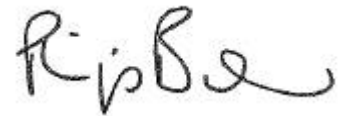
You are summoned to attend a meeting of the East Sussex County Council to be held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes, **on Tuesday, 2 December 2025 at 10.00 am** to transact the following business

1. **Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2025** (Pages 5 - 14)
2. **Apologies for absence**
3. **Chairman's business**
4. **Questions from members of the public**
5. **Report of the Cabinet** (Pages 15 - 30)
6. **Report of the Governance Committee** (Pages 31 - 40)
7. **Questions from County Councillors**
 - a) Oral questions to Cabinet Members
 - b) Written questions of which notice has been given pursuant to Standing Order 44
8. **Report of the East Sussex Fire Authority** (Pages 41 - 44)
9. **Urgent Decisions** (Pages 45 - 46)

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 the Reverend C Peter Molloy, St Mark the Evangelist Church, Buxted. 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

PHILIP BAKER
Deputy Chief Executive



24 November 2025

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MINUTES

EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 24 SEPTEMBER 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, Kathryn Field, Gerard Fox, Nuala Geary, Keith Glazier, OBE, Alan Hay, Julia Hilton, Ian Hollidge, Stephen Holt, Johanna Howell, Eleanor Kirby-Green, Carolyn Lambert, Tom Liddiard, Philip Lunn, James MacCleary, Wendy Maples, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Carl Maynard, Matthew Milligan, 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 Brett Wright

31. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2025

31.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the County Council meeting held on 8 July 2025.

32. Apologies for absence

32.1 Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Claire Dowing, Chris Dowling, Sarah Osborne, Steve Murphy and Trevor Webb.

33. Chairman's business

COUNCILLOR PETER PRAGNELL

33.1 The Chairman began with the sad news of the death of Councillor Peter Pragnell. Councillor Pragnell was first elected to Hastings Borough Council in 2000 where he served until 2023 representing both St Helen's ward and Conquest ward during his time. Councillor Pragnell served as the Leader for Hasting Borough Council between 2006 and 2010. As a County Councillor, Councillor Pragnell was elected to represent the Ashdown and Conquest division in 2009. Councillor Pragnell served as Chairman from 2018 to 2019 and again from 2021 to 2024. He served on multiple outside bodies during his time at the County Council including the East Sussex Fire Authority. The Leader of the Council and the other group leaders offered condolences and shared memories of Councillor Pragnell. The Council stood for a moment's silence as a mark of respect to Councillor Pragnell.

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CHAIRMAN'S ACTIVITIES

33.2 The Chairman reported that he had attended a number of engagements since the last County Council meeting including: a combined visit with the Mayor of Hastings, Dieppe Raid Commemorative event hosted by the Mayor of Newhaven, the Eastbourne and District Samaritans AGM, and Dieppe Commemorations hosted by the Mayor of Dieppe. The Chairman also attended Heathfield Full Fibre Broadband Celebration, Battle of Britain Dinner hosted by the Royal Society of St George (Seahaven Branch), and the East Sussex Healthcare Trust AGM.

33.3 The Chairman thanked the Vice Chairman for his ongoing support, including his attendance at the East Sussex Philippine Festival, Bexhill Day hosted by the Mayor of Bexhill, Grand Opening of Tuk Tuk Hastings hosted by Hastings Pan Asian Takeaway, and the second anniversary celebration at MLC Ltd in Bexhill. The Vice Chairman also attended the 20th anniversary of the Bexhill Classic Car Show hosted by 100 Motoring Club, Civic service in Peacehaven hosted by the Peacehaven mayor, and the Battle of Britain Parade hosted by the Mayor of Bexhill.

PETITIONS

33.4 The following petition were presented before the meeting by Councillor Wright:

Name of Presenting Councillor	Subject of Petition
Councillor Wright	Introduction of traffic calming measures around the village Meads

PRAYERS

33.5 The Chairman thanked Reverend Ben Brown, St Anne's Church, Lewes for leading the prayers before the meeting.

34. Questions from members of the public

34.1 Copies of the question from a member of the public and the answer from Councillor Glazier OBE, Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development, are attached to these minutes. One supplementary question was asked and responded to.

35. Declarations of Interest

35.1 The Chairman stated that all Members have been granted with a dispensation, in relation to their membership of the Council and any membership of a district or borough council under the Localism Act 2011 and the Council's Code of Conduct to enable them to participate and vote on the items on the agenda which relate to devolution and local government reorganisation.

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35.2 The following members declared a personal interest in item 6 on the agenda as follows:

Member	Position giving rise to interest	Whether interest was prejudicial
Councillor Chris Collier	Cabinet Member for Lewes District Council	No
Councillor Johnny Denis	Cabinet Member for Lewes District Council	No
Councillor Johanna Howell	Member of Wealden District Council	No
Councillor Julia Hilton	Deputy Leader of Hastings Borough Council	No
Councillor Wendy Maples	Cabinet Member for Lewes District Council Member of Lewes Town Council	No
Councillor Christine Robinson	Deputy Leader for Lewes District Council	No
Councillor Pat Rodohan	Member of Eastbourne Borough Council	No

35.3 Councillor Ungar declared a personal interest in item 6 as having a member of family who works as a local government officer in the county of East Sussex. He did not consider this to be prejudicial.

36. Reports

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

Leader and Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development report – paragraph 1 (Local Government Reorganisation: Proposal for a single tier of local government across East Sussex), paragraph 2 (Devolution Update) and paragraph 3 (Update on Lane Rental Scheme following implementation).

NON-RESERVED PARAGRAPHS

36.2 On the motion of the Chairman of the County Council, the Council adopted those paragraphs in the report that had not been reserved for discussion as follows:

Governance report - Paragraph 1 (Amendment to the Constitution – Scheme of Delegation to Officers).

37. Report of the Leader and Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development

Paragraph 1 - Local Government Reorganisation: Proposal for a single tier of local government across East Sussex

37.1 Councillor Glazier moved the reserved paragraph.

37.2 The following amendment was moved by Councillor Collier and seconded by Councillor Denis.

(delete the following wording)

~~★ (1) Note the business case setting out the proposal for a single tier of local Government in East Sussex; and~~

~~— (2) Express views on the proposals ahead of consideration by Cabinet.~~

[replace with the following wording]

The County Council agrees to endorse the One East Sussex proposal and recommends that Cabinet agrees to its submission to Government.

37.3 The amendment was CARRIED.

Paragraph 2 – Devolution update

37.4 Councillor Glazier moved the reserved paragraph.

37.5 The following amendment was moved by Councillor Tutt and seconded by Councillor Field.

(delete the following wording)

~~Express the devolution update as set out in the report~~

[replace with the following wording]

This Council recognises the Government's commitment to devolution and calls upon the Government to hold the election using the Supplementary Vote (SV) system.

37.6 The amendment was LOST.

37.7 Council agreed to note the devolution update.

Paragraph 3 – Update on the Lane Rental Scheme following implementation

37.8 Councillor Glazier moved the reserved paragraph.

37.9 The motion, including the recommendations, was CARRIED after debate.

38. Notice of Motion proposing a delay in the Mayor election to 2027

38.1 The following motion was moved by Councillor Taylor and seconded by Councillor Denis:

The Westminster Government has announced its intention to return to the Supplementary Vote (SV) system for mayoral elections, which compared to First Past The Post (FPTP) better reflects the preferences and values of residents particularly when electing a single powerful figure across a large constituency. The government has announced that mayoral elections will revert to the SV system as soon as they can get that change instituted, but this is likely to be too late for the 2026 elections. This would put Sussex among the disadvantaged counties that are in the fast track with our residents electing a mayor under an outdated and problematic electoral system.

When Sussex decided to join the priority programme there was no suggestion that there would be any democratic disadvantage from being at the front of the queue, (notwithstanding some of us were concerned about the haste and doubted that there was anything to gain).

It now appears that there will be distinct disadvantages as the process for Sussex is too hurried for the government to get the necessary statutory instruments properly in place. We should not have to implement a new mayoral authority under a poor and unrepresentative system. We therefore propose that the administration should work with West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council to seek to delay the Mayoral election to the 2027 electoral cycle.

Advantages of delaying the Mayor election to 2027 are:

- *It will coincide with the anticipated unitary elections for West and East Sussex, so the combined costs will be lower and there will be a higher turnout for both.*
- *It will be more equitable across the country for all coming mayor elections to have the same voting system.*
- *It is better for democracy as there will be more certainty for residents and political parties locally, and more time to communicate clarity about what the devolution and government reorganisation mean for the local areas.*

This council therefore requests the Leader:

1. *to approach West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council to open negotiations on a change to the schedule for implementing devolution in order to better reflect the preferences of residents in electing a Mayor; and*
2. *to work together with West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council with a view to approaching the minister for local government to request to revise the timetable and/or withdraw from the priority programme and undertake the Devolution process according to a more appropriate timetable.*

38.2 The motion was LOST after debate.

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39. Questions from County Councillors

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

Questioner	Respondent	Subject
Councillor Field	Councillor Claire Dowling	Public rights of way.
Councillor Lambert	Councillor Glazier	The raising of flags on ESCC infrastructure
Councillor Swansborough	Councillor Bennett	The CIPFA review of ESCC.
Councillor Adeniji	Councillor Claire Dowling	Fairways Road, Seaford

39.2 There were two oral questions from members to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment. In the absence of the Lead Member, it was agreed that oral questions should be submitted in writing to Councillor Claire Dowling for a response.

39.3 There were no written questions received from Councillors.

THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 12.45pm

The reports referred to are included in the minute book

COUNTY COUNCIL – 24 SEPTEMBER 2025

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Question to the Leader of the Council from Mr. Callan – Etchingham, East Sussex

The Queensway Gateway Road connection is at last, nearing completion. It is known for being years behind schedule. It is also substantially over budget. What many have forgotten is that this was not the original planned junction. This was defined as a temporary solution because Sea Change Sussex were unable to deliver the original budgeted and planned version.

Too many attempts have been made to deny accountability. ESCC has **always** had responsibility for the delivery of this project. It is set out in the contractually binding Service Level Agreement signed by ESCC and Essex County Council as the accountable body holding Central Government funds for SELEP.

I trust there will be no disingenuous denial of these publicly recorded facts.

When responding to a resident at the last Council meeting the Leader refused to give a latest cost estimate for fear of being criticised if it was wrong. Two months on and with all the accounting resources available to ESCC at his disposal he must now have a reliable latest cost forecast he feels confident he can share with the Council Taxpayer. The only reasons for not publishing now must be incompetence or embarrassment.

The disruption, delays and costs to motorists both private and commercial and businesses are enormous. The small town of Battle has suffered huge traffic flows including HGVs with no other choice than to use Battle as a diversion for month after month after month. Travelling to the Conquest from the West has been a logistical nightmare unless the appointment was between 10.30 and 14.30.

It is insufficient for ESCC spokesman to have made bland apologies based on the theme - 'it will all be ok soon, just be patient'.

No one can deny this project has been an unmitigated shambles from start to (almost) finish. The question is, why? Officers stay quiet other than to deny accountability. Councillors of all parties seem to be cowed into silence and claim they are trying to get answers (unsuccessfully) behind the scenes.

This is not good enough and the Leader has enough experience and is big enough person to acknowledge this.

QUESTION

The QGR project has been a shambles. As Local Government Reorganisation approaches and Unitary Authority Status increases, the scope of such projects will increase. It is vital REAL lessons are learned from this shamble to prevent anything similar ever happening again. The only way this can be achieved is by way of public examination by a Scrutiny Committee sitting and hearing all evidence in open session, including the giving and acceptance of witness statements from the public.

The Leader is asked to establish such an inquiry and in the answer to this question define the Terms of Reference and commencement date of the inquiry.

"Will the Leader establish such an inquiry, and in doing so define the Terms of Reference and commencement date of the inquiry?"

Richard Callan – Etchingham, East Sussex

ESCC responses to both the statements made and the question from Mr Callan

A) On Responsibility for delivery of the project:

East Sussex County Council had contractual responsibilities as the Local Accountable Body to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Local Growth Fund programme. This included ensuring the completion of projects, whether delivered directly or by third parties, for which government funding had been received. As a result, the County Council had a formal agreement with SELEP and a back-to-back agreement with the delivery sponsor, Sea Change Sussex to complete the works.

As the project was not fully completed by Sea Change Sussex an options appraisal exercise was undertaken, to identify the best way forward to complete the Queensway Gateway Road development and a paper was presented to the Lead Member for approval decision on 14 March 2024. The recommendation was for the County Council to undertake the works for the final phases and instruct its own highways contractor, Balfour Beatty Living Places, to complete the development and open the road to the public. Those works are on public highway land and carried out under the permitted development rights as the Highway Authority.

B) On the Temporary Solution to approved scheme:

The original roundabout design for the final phase and connection to the A21 was replaced with a signalised junction due to land acquisition challenges. The revised scheme uses permitted development rights as the Highway Authority under the Town and Country Planning Act (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 and when the County Council elected to take over responsibility for delivery on 14 March 2024, the decision was taken to complete the project with a signalised junction which has received the approval of National Highways and the County Council. Additional planning permission was granted for a footway/cycleway on Beauharrow Road on 19 March 2025 (Ref: HS/3503/CC).

C) On the costs of the scheme:

Construction of the Queensway Gateway Road project is still ongoing; at this stage, final construction costs are subject to change due to site additional complexity from site discovery, resource changes, and final as-built construction requirements. As such, the County Council cannot provide a final account or provide an ongoing commentary on financial costs but confirms that the project is following its planned expenditure profile. Final project costs will be known after completion and any budget reconciliation work.

D) On costs to motorists and businesses

The Queensway Gateway Road project has required the use of traffic management measures and diversionary routes to ensure safe delivery of the scheme and to meet essential health and safety requirements on site. It is of course regrettable that these measures may have caused disruption and inconvenience to residents and local businesses.

As the works take place on the region's strategic road network, it is almost inevitable that introducing any traffic management needed to deliver the project may inherently have some impact on public and commercial traffic movement.

The County Council, as the highway authority, is not obliged to pay compensation for traffic disruption or loss of business during the carrying out of road works or infrastructure projects nor does it have the funding to do so. That being said, these works, when completed, will ultimately deliver long term benefits for residents, visitors and businesses helping to improve connectivity, accessibility and economic growth.

E) Lessons Learnt and a request for public examination/inquiry by a Scrutiny Committee.

At this stage we are focused on completing the last phase of this project and all the County Council's resources for the project are focused on achieving this. Once the road has been completed and all construction operations have been ceased and the Council's contractors have exited from the site, as part of our procedures in closing out the activity on this project, and in common with other similar projects, we undertake post project appraisals to inform future projects. Scrutiny committee may wish to consider additional appraisals or review as part of their work programme.

END

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REPORT OF THE CABINET

The Cabinet met on 24 September, 21 October and 11 November 2025.

Attendees: -

Councillor Glazier OBE (Chair) (3)
Councillors Bennett (Vice-Chair) (3), Bowdler (3), di Cara (3), Claire Dowling (2) Maynard (3), and Standley (3)

1. Council Monitoring Q1 2025/26

1.1 The Cabinet 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 June 2025.

1.2 Broad progress against the Council's four strategic priority outcomes is summarised from paragraph 1.14 and an overview of finance and performance data is provided in the Corporate Summary at Appendix 1. Strategic risks are reported at Appendix 8.

Update on the year end position for the Council Plan 2024/25

1.3. Outturns are now available for the 6 Council Plan measures for 2024/25, which were carried over from quarter 4. Measures are carried over when action has been completed but outturn data is not available for reporting at year-end. Outturns for these measures are provided in Appendix 3 (Adult Social Care and Health) and Appendix 4 (Business Services Department). Overall, 75% of targets (45 of the 60 Council Plan measures) for 2024/25 were met or exceeded.

1.4 The outturn of 31% for the unclassified roads measure has been replaced with a null outturn (represented as 'not available' in the Council Plan) for the 2024/25 year due to identified data quality issues. Further information is provided in Appendix 6.

Overview of Council Plan 2025/26 outturns and strategic risks

1.5 The Council Plan 2025/26 and the Portfolio Plans 2025/26 – 2027/28 have been updated with available 2024/25 outturns and final performance measure targets. All plans are published on the Council's website. The Corporate Summary (Appendix 1) contains a forecast of performance against targets.

1.6 The Strategic Risk Register, Appendix 8, was reviewed and updated to reflect the Council's risk profile. Risk 12 (Cyber Attack), Risk 15 (Climate), Risk 9 (Workforce) and Risk 6 (Local Economic Growth) have updated risk definitions and risk controls. Risk 22 (Oracle), Risk 4 (Health), Risk 5 (Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources), Risk 20 (Placements for Children and Young People in Our Care), Risk 1 (Roads), and Risk 18 (Data Breach) have updated risk controls.

Budget Outturn

1.7 The detailed revenue projections for each department are set out in the relevant appendices which show a projected overspend of £25.8m by 31 March 2026. All departments other than Governance Services are overspending, reflecting the difficult financial situation that the Council, along with many others, face.

1.8 The 2025/26 budget, set in February 2025, included a number of modelled assumptions, particularly in demand-led social care services, with regard to the number of people who would access our services plus the costs of the delivery of the services required to meet their assessed needs. Whilst additional budget was provided for growth in demand, demographic changes and inflationary pressures, departments are reporting below how in a number in service areas demand is now modelled to exceed the assumptions made in the latter part of 2024. Costs are also rising as the impact of increases in staffing costs and the complexity of need that needs to be supported continue to grow.

1.9 The main headlines are:

- Children's Services (CSD) is forecast to overspend by £16.7m; the main financial pressure continues to come from the statutory demand-driven areas of Looked After Children (LAC), Child Protection, and Home to School Transport.

LAC placements remain the largest financial pressure within Children's Services, with overspend forecast on agency residential and secure placements, due in part to the volume of high-need placements and increased cost of high-cost placements.

The LAC placement budget had £3.210m growth in 2025/26, which was calculated based on an assumed 1.23% increase in numbers. In reality, LAC numbers have only increased by 0.16% since 2024/25, but there is a higher number of placements for young people with complex needs costing over £10k per week, increasing from 15 in 2024/25 to 21 in Q1 2025/26. This is a national trend as recently highlighted in a report by the Local Government Association. The risk remains of children who are currently unknown to the service entering into high-cost care placements from hospital, youth justice settings, or adoption breakdowns throughout this year and it is hard to quantify a forecast for the unknowns.

Actions undertaken to mitigate the costs include: the Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) contributing to a significant reduction in child protection numbers and cost avoidance through enabling children at the edge of care to remain living safely within their families; the Foundations programme aimed at avoiding repeat care proceedings for parents/carers who have previously had children removed from their care; Family Group Conferencing and support for Kinship carers; embedding of the Valuing Care approach to achieve step-downs and reunifications; a new "Heading Home" strategy to support reunification planning and monitoring; and the establishment of a commissioning and placements service in 2024/25 to focus on improved market management and challenging provider costs; and work with the Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) to improve placement sufficiency and market management across the South East.

The service is ambitious to realise a 3% reduction in LAC numbers this year. It should not be assumed that this will translate to an equivalent 3% reduction in costs across all placement types, as it is more likely that reunifications will be achieved for children in lower cost placements. The risk remains that any additional or extended high-cost placements could have a material impact on the forecast throughout this year.

The overspend in Home to School Transport can be mainly attributed to the number of clients with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). Spend on these clients is set to increase by 10% from 2024/25; linked both to Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers and unit costs increasing. Significant work has gone into implementing cost reduction measures within the service including a review of solo routes and optimisation of routes.

Not included in the figures reported above is the position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which, in accordance with the statutory accounting override set out in the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2020, allow local authorities to carry forward DSG deficits on their balance sheets. As of 31 March 2025, East Sussex has a cumulative DSG surplus of £2.8m, which is very unusual, as most local authorities have significant DSG deficits. However, it is projected that there will be a deficit of £19.1m by

the end of 2025/26, which will be taken directly to the balance sheet and presented in the statement of accounts as negative reserves.

This sudden transition to a DSG deficit is caused by pressures within the High Needs Block of DSG, which is used to fund education for children and young people with SEND or who attend Alternative Provision. There is an accelerating demand for special school placements which, as East Sussex's maintained schools are full, means that children are placed increasingly in Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMS) at inflated cost. There is limited control over the annual increases in costs at INMS as there is no legal framework in which to challenge the costs of provision. Additionally, there is an increase in the number of children for whom parents are requesting costly bespoke provision outside of school, such as private tutoring and agencies.

- The forecast overspend for Adult Social Care is £9.0m which largely relates to the Independent Sector, where the overspend is forecast to be £8.7m. This is due to an increase in demand and more people being supported, however it should be noted that support is being provided at a lower average cost than previous years, because the service is managing the market, being prudent with packages of support and reviewing more people. There is an overspend in Directly Provided Services of £0.316m due to staffing cost pressures, increasing costs and demand for equipment services to support people in their homes and legal fees.
- Communities, Economy and Transport is showing a forecast overspend of £0.1m. The largest overspend is in Highways where the cost of electricity for street lighting and depots is higher than budgeted, offset by underspends in other areas.
- There is a forecast overspend of £0.2m for Business Services Property Services due to increased procurement costs for the new Digital Hub and loss of income from a courier service contract.

1.10 Within Centrally Held Budgets (CHB), including Treasury Management (TM), and corporate funding there is a forecast underspend of £10.8m, which includes the general contingency:

- There is currently an estimated £0.9m underspend on TM, based on a reduced in-year capital borrowing requirement and greater than anticipated returns on investments. It should be noted that there has been a fall in cash investment balances; whilst above benchmark returns are being achieved, the level of balances has fallen by 36% in one year to £137.2m at the end of June 2025.
- Within CHB the forecast underspend of £9.9m is due to the General Contingency of £5.7m, using £3.3m from the provision for budgetary risks, and £1.5m available from not transferring this contribution to the Capital Programme, offset by £0.6m debt impairment.
- Corporate Funding budgets are underspending by £0.2m, due to the additional allocations of Social Care-related grant and New Homes Bonus.

1.11 The net impact of the above is an unplanned draw from reserves of £14.9m in 2025/26. This is in addition to the planned £11.4m draw to present a balanced position in setting the 2025/26 budget. Use of the Capital reserve has the potential to increase the requirement to borrow, leading into increased costs in the future; use of Collection Fund surplus and Insurance and Local Government Reorganisation Reserves will likely hinder the Council's management of future risk and transformation. The Council's strategic reserves are £16.5m at 1 April 2025 - for comparison, the latest published budget gap after likely funding scenarios for 2026/27 is £24.6m. Any reduction in 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 or exceptional financial support. To address the projected in-year overspend and reduce the required draw from reserves, the Council continues with several actions introduced last year, 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 CMT approval of non-core role recruitment.

1.12 The total savings identified to be delivered in 2025/26, including slippage from previous years, are £14.3m. Departments are reporting that £13.2m will be able to be delivered in 2025/26, with £1.0m slipping to future years, and £0.2m not being able to be achieved but being replaced by other permanent savings. The impact of the slippage has been reflected in the revenue monitoring position. The departmental appendices provide more detail.

1.13 The Capital Programme net expenditure for the year is projected to be £95.6m against a budget of £103.0m. A slippage risk factor has 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 will be held at a corporate level to enable services / project managers to manage project budgets at a local level, whilst ensuring greater robustness to the planning and monitoring process at a corporate level. The net forecast expenditure after applying this risk factor is £84.8m.

- The programme is forecasting total slippage of £8.1m which is further to reprofiling undertaken as part of the State of the County review. The quarter 1 slippage relates wholly to the Bus Service Improvement Plan (£8.1m) from a mixture of the 2025/26 (new) programme and previous years' programme.
- The programme is projecting an overspend of £0.7m, relating to: House Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers Homes (0.5m) historic commitments and the Bexhill and Hastings Link Road (£0.2m).

Progress against Council Priorities

Driving sustainable economic growth

1.14 The Council has spent £398m with 992 local suppliers over the past 12 months. This equates to 61% of our total procurement spend, which is above our target of 60%. The Procurement team continues to promote our contract opportunities to local suppliers, as well as building local supply chain opportunities into our tenders where possible. 17 contracts, with a value of £3.83m, were agreed in quarter 1 and as part of these we secured £1.24m in social value commitments. This equates to 32% of the contract value, and will include apprenticeships, the creation of local jobs and careers awareness programmes amongst other initiatives (Appendix 4).

1.15 Work on our highways has continued, with 7,080 potholes repaired in quarter 1, 4,903 of these being carriageway potholes and the remainder primarily footway potholes. We completed 42 road improvement schemes in quarter 1 to improve the condition of the roads (Appendix 6).

1.16 The Skills East Sussex Engineering Task Group delivered engineering clubs at schools in Hastings in quarter 1, to help meet the Skills East Sussex priorities. We also procured partners during quarter 1 to deliver eight Skills Bootcamp courses during 2025/26. Delivery of the Bootcamps is due to start in quarter 2 (Appendix 6).

1.17 67 businesses in East Sussex were supported through business support programmes during quarter 1. 47 of these were supported through the Growth Hub, 17 through Newhaven Business Grants and 3 through Rural Business Grants (Appendix 6).

1.18 Skills East Sussex celebrated a decade of working to improve local employment and skills levels and boost economic prosperity in East Sussex in quarter 1. Achievements over the last 10 years have included securing over £60m of additional funding for the delivery of employment and skills initiatives and capital infrastructure; launching one of the UK's first

Growth Hubs and developing adult learning and employment programmes such as Moving on Up, Support into Work and Multiply (Appendix 6).

Keeping vulnerable people safe

1.19 The number of children with a Child Protection Plan has reduced to 579 at the end of quarter 1, down from 614 in quarter 4 2024/25. This has been achieved through effective multi-disciplinary work with children and families, reducing risk and effecting change with families. The rate of Looked After Children decreased slightly in quarter 1 to 67.1 per 10,000 (695 children) down from 67.3 per 100,000 at quarter 4 2024/25, which is below the national average rate for England, at 73.9 in Q4 2024/25, and IDACI (expected rates based on levels of deprivation) at 70.0, Q4 2023/24, but higher than the rate for our statistical neighbours (62.8, quarter 4 2024/25) (Appendix 5).

1.20 The 2024/25 outturn (reported a quarter in arrears) for the percentage of people affected by rape, sexual violence and abuse who have improved coping strategies was 86.6% against a target of 88%. The provider has attributed the lower performance to staff changes across the organisation and data accuracy. Guidance on inputting information has now been created to resolve the issue. (Appendix 3).

1.21 A new contract to provide safe accommodation for people seeking safety from domestic abuse in East Sussex began on 1 July 2025. The new provider, Interventions Alliance, has taken over the 37 existing units of accommodation in the county. Plans to provide an additional 18 units within the first 6 months of the contract are underway (Appendix 3).

1.22 Trading Standards made 45 interventions during quarter 1 to protect vulnerable people. These interventions included installing call blockers and CCTV for vulnerable people who had been repeatedly targeted by scammers. 63 businesses received training or advice from Trading Standards during quarter 1 (Appendix 6).

Helping people help themselves

1.23 The Council's Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) have continued to deliver support and interventions with parents and carers of children on Children in Need or Child Protection Plans. They work with parents across the county providing dedicated support to address their personal issues, in order to support families to stay together and improve the wellbeing and life chances of children. In quarter 1, interventions with 78% of families we worked with were successfully concluded. This supported parents and carers to achieve stability in relation to their mental health, drug and alcohol use, safety from abuse or causing others harm (Appendix 5).

1.24 The Early Years Funding team works closely with parent and carers, early years providers and other agencies to ensure the take up of the Department for Education's (DfE) free early education entitlement for three- and four-year-olds. Four schools in East Sussex were successful in bidding to the DfE and will all receive capital funding of up to £150K to establish school-based nurseries. These new nurseries will help increase the number of places available for families to access funded early education and childcare places (Appendix 5).

1.25 The 2024/25 outturn (reported a quarter in arrears) for the number of IMD1 NHS Health Checks conducted, shows that there was a decrease of 16% in 2024/25, compared to 2023/24, against a target of a 9% increase. The overall NHS Health Check activity by Hastings and Rother Healthcare reduced by 43% between 2023/24 and 2024/25. Furthermore, unlike in previous years, overall health check activity across East Sussex did not increase in quarter 4 as expected. This may be linked to significant changes in how the programme is to be delivered from 2025/26, alongside wider operational pressures (Appendix 3).

1.26 4.32% of the local smoking population set a quit date in 2024/25 (reported a quarter in arrears), against a target of 7%. However, individuals who do set a quit date achieve good outcomes with the stop smoking service, with 59% achieving a four-week quit against a target of 50%. As smoking declines nationally the service is engaging with the more entrenched smoking community, which may be impacting on the number who want to quit. Public Health have begun a number of programmes to help encourage people to access stop smoking support (Appendix 3).

Making best use of resources now and for the future

1.27 During quarter 1, the Leader and Chief Executive continued to raise issues and priorities for the county with our local MPs, including through a specific update on our State of the County report. This set out the uncertain and stark financial position the Council faces and asked for MPs' support in lobbying Government to recognise the specific and unique needs of East Sussex, which are more acute than much of the rest of the South East, and that these must be appropriately reflected in new funding arrangements (Appendix 7).

1.28 We completed 5 energy efficiency schemes during quarter 1, including 2 solar PV schemes, 2 insulation schemes and 1 estate rationalisation. The total Council carbon emissions outturn for 2024/25 (reported a quarter in arrears) saw a 36% reduction against a target of 50%. Carbon emissions from the Council's electricity consumption fell by 3% during 2024/25. As the grid carbon emissions factor remained the same in 2024/25 as in 2023/24, the 3% emissions reduction is principally down to the Council reducing its electricity use. In 2024/25, external temperatures for East Sussex were lower than in 2023/24. This colder weather increased heating demand and prevented the Council from seeing a reduction in emissions from fossil fuel heat, which have remained at the same level year on year (Appendix 4).

1.29 The Council has continued to work with a range of partners to develop and deliver carbon reduction and climate change adaptation work in quarter 1. This included finalising a climate change adaptation toolkit, which will be rolled out to 3 Council services during 2025/26. We also continued discussions with GB Energy about options for securing third party funding for rooftop solar panels on schools (Appendix 6).

1.30 The quarter 1 sickness absence figure for the whole authority (excluding schools) is 2.08 days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) role, a 3.8% decrease compared to quarter 1 2024/25. The year end estimate for 2025/26 (based on the quarter 1 data) is 8.86 days/FTE, so the target of 9.10 days/FTE is predicted to be met (Appendix 4).

1.31 The Council has continued work to ensure its office hubs are used efficiently, and during quarter 1, 2 properties were marketed for sale, Sandbanks in Hailsham and the former Rangers' Workshop in Rye. A public consultation has also begun on the disposal of the Tilling Green Playing Fields in Rye. In addition, marketing of vacant space in South and East Blocks at County Hall has commenced (Appendix 4).

1.32 The Government's consultation on the proposed establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Sussex closed early in quarter 1. The consultation followed our successful application, along with West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, to join the national devolution priority programme, working on an accelerated timescale towards a mayoral election in May 2026. Subject to further national and local decisions, work will continue to prepare for the creation of the combined authority, including the legislation required. As part of the Government's separate plans for the reorganisation of local government, the Council has continued to work with district and borough council partners to develop a final reorganisation proposal for a single unitary council for East Sussex, which was submitted to Government in September 2025 (Appendix 7).

1.33 The Council's East Sussex Wellbeing and Employment Service won the 'excellent support' category at the National Homeless Link awards during quarter 1. The award recognises the holistic approach to bringing together housing, health, wellbeing and support

into skills and employment for people who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation and for people who are at risk of being homeless (Appendix 3).

2. Ashdown Forest Trust Fund

2.1 The Ashdown Forest Trust, a registered charity, was set out by declaration of Trust in 1988. East Sussex County Council is the trustee and agrees grants made to the Ashdown Forest Conservators, from the Ashdown Forest Trust Fund.

2023/24 Accounts

2.2 Subsequent to the 2023/24 accounts being approved, the Independent Examination process has now been completed in accordance with Section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. The Examiner's report is attached as Appendix 9. It does not identify any issues that require any further action by the Council as the trustees.

2024/25 Accounts

2.3 The Trust's Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet are set out in the attached Appendix 10. The Income and Expenditure Account shows a surplus in 2024/25 of £9,062, as a result of no legal cost being incurred during the year.

2.4 The main source of income to the Trust relates to the rent from the Royal Ashdown Golf Club at £70,000 per annum. The only other income this year was from bank interest. The expenditure mostly relates to the £65,100 grant paid to the Ashdown Forest Conservators. The remaining expenditure was for audit fees.

2.5 The accumulative General Reserve totalled £188,346 at 31 March 2025.

2.6 A formal annual report and statement of accounts will be compiled in accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) by the end of January 2026, once the Independent Examiner report has been received.

General Reserve

2.7 The General Reserve current balance is £188,346.

2.8 With the Ashdown Forest Trust Deeds it states in:

- Clause 3(2), the Trust are "promoting the conservation of Ashdown Forest as a quiet and natural area of outstanding beauty and as an amenity and place of last resort for members of the public".
- Clause 7(1)(c), gives the Council power as trustee to permit the Conservators "to apply any profits rents or other income of Ashdown (whether collected by the Conservators or paid to the trustee by the Conservators) in furtherance of the object set out in clause 3 above and so that the trustee may authorise the Conservators to determine the manner in which such profits rents or other income are to be applied in furtherance of the said object..."

2.9 Information provided at Appendix 11, highlights a £113,700 programme of tree surveys and works required across the forest.

2.10 The Conservators carried out the work defined as very urgent and urgent, leaving £107,200 outstanding, of which a further £8,000 will be covered by the Conservator's budget.

2.11 The Conservators requested to draw the remaining £99,200 from the General Reserve.

2.12 The Trust made an operating surplus of £9,062 during 2024/25. The General Reserve as at 31 March 2025 amounted to £188,346. This fund is available to finance expenditure which meets the Trust's objectives.

2.13 Cabinet approved the Conservators' request to £99,200 from the General Reserve to fund works required across the forest.

3. Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assessment of Adult Social Care

3.1 The Health and Care Act 2022 granted the Care Quality Commission (CQC) new powers to assess local authorities' compliance with the Care Act 2014. The 'return of the regulator' was a significant development for adult social care departments who had not been assessed by statutory, external bodies for approximately 15 years.

3.2 The CQC developed a new assessment framework for adult social care assessments as these differed significantly from their existing assessment regimes. This first round of assessments has been a learning process for all parties and the CQC adjusted their methodology throughout this first round of assessments and have indicated that they will undertake future assessments differently. Details of any new approach have not yet been shared.

3.3 The CQC were clear that, whilst they understand the pressures faced by adult social care departments and their partners nationally, they would not take this into account when assessing our delivery of the Care Act.

3.4 In East Sussex, a significant amount of preparatory work was undertaken in advance of the CQC assessment. This included an extensive self-evaluation process using the industry standard Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Social Services (ADASS) self-assessment tool. We produced a Self-assessment document, which was promoted by the LGA as good practice. We commissioned an LGA Peer Review in February 2024 as a way of providing further assurance and insights into our key strengths and areas for development. Our preparation for assessment was reviewed by the People Scrutiny Committee CQC Reference Group.

3.5 East Sussex was notified of the official start of our CQC assessment on 12 August 2024. Stage one of the assessment was to supply the CQC with around 250 pieces of evidence including performance data, policies, strategic plans and our Self-assessment. Following the submission of this evidence, we focussed on preparation sessions for Members and staff who would meet with the CQC and in providing summary case file information to support the CQC in conversations with adults and carers who had used our services.

3.6 East Sussex was notified on 2 December 2024 that the on-site element of the assessment would take place between the 11 and 13 of February 2025. We ran mock interview sessions and additional preparation sessions in the lead into the site visit.

3.7 The second phase of the CQC assessment included:

- Interviews with adults and carers who had used ASCH services.
- Interviews with Members including the Leader of the Council, the Lead and opposition Lead Members for ASCH and cross-party representatives from the People Scrutiny Committee, including the Chair.
- Interviews with ASCH officers including the Chief Executive, Director of ASCH, Director of Public Health and staff from across the department.
- Drop in sessions for ASCH staff
- Questionnaires and interviews with key external stakeholders and partners including the NHS, the voluntary community and social enterprise sectors and the independent chair of the Safeguarding Board.
- Preparing a three hour pre-assessment on-line presentation for the CQC which highlighted our key strengths and areas for development.

3.8 The CQC published its assessment of East Sussex Adult Social Care and Health's delivery of the Care Act on 3 October 2025. The full report can be found at Appendix 12. Key findings from the assessment are summarised below. Proposed next steps are set out further in the report.

Overall rating

3.9 Adult Social Care and Health achieved a rating of 'Good'. This means that the CQC consider the service to be performing well and meeting their expectations.

Areas of strength and areas for improvement

3.10 The CQC framework is set out using four overarching themes. Each of these themes are outlined below with the key strengths and areas for development identified by the CQC.

Theme 1: Working with people - Strengths

3.11 Adult Social Care and Health is easily accessible

The report identified that Adult Social Care and Health is easily accessible through Health and Social Care Connect (HSCC) and information and advice was available as well as onward referrals to relevant support and services.

3.12 Person centred care planning

The approach to assessment and care planning was person-centred and strength based. The CQC stated *'The approach reflected people's right to choice, built on their strengths and assets and reflected what they wanted to achieve and how they wished to live their lives. People told us they felt listened to throughout their Care Act assessment and that their views were heard and respected.'*

3.13 Development of an integrated offer through Integrated Care Teams (ICTs)

There was recognition of the work being undertaken with partners such as, primary and community health services, borough and district councils, mental health, the NHS Sussex ICB and Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to develop an integrated offer of health, care and wellbeing throughout the ICTs.

3.14. Prevention offer that includes the use of technology and OT clinics

The report acknowledges the preventive offer including Occupational Health clinics that people could attend and telecare which is technology that enables people to remain independent and safe in their own homes. The CQC reported that *'The local authority works*

with people, partners and the local community to make available a range of services, facilities, resources and other measures to promote independence, and to prevent, delay or reduce the need for care and support.'

3.15 The report recognised the significant impact of the Joint Community Reablement and Rehabilitation (JCR) service in preventing on-going care needs, by stating *'In 2023/24 72% of adults did not require on-going care after receiving JCR support.'*

3.16 Effective delivery of Direct Payments

The report outlined that Direct Payments were well managed, and staff were supported to ensure they are offered to all adults and contained the following, *'People told us they received direct payments from the local authority. The direct payment process was easy to understand, and payments were received on time and as planned.'*

3.17 Effectively reducing inequalities

The report outlines that there is a good understanding of local demographics and this information is used to reduce inequalities in people's care and support experiences and outcomes. There is an Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy and action plan in place. It acknowledged the Accessible Information Standard policy and how staff would consider people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss, and ensured they were able to get information in a format they understood.

Theme 1: Working with people - Areas for development

3.18 Waiting lists for Care Act assessments and reviews

The report outlines that Adult Care Act assessments and reviews, Carers, Occupational Therapy and Financial Assessments were not always completed in a timely manner. The CQC noted that there were waiting lists in place.

3.19 The CQC however, recognised the work that has been undertaken on waiting times and the implementation of an enhanced, standard process for managing waiting lists which includes: better communication with people, better management of waiting lists by monitoring risk and the management of performance.

3.20 Inconsistent information about Financial Assessments

The CQC found that information around Financial Assessments was not consistently made clear to people but noted the project to improve waiting times and communication regarding financial assessments including working with the Citizen Panel and People Bank to design and test new versions of written communications.

3.21 Limited information on the effectiveness of signposting

Although the report recognised information and advice was provided by HSCC to East Sussex residents; it identified that there was not a systemic approach to monitor whether signposting had been effective for people.

Theme 2: Providing Support - Strengths

3.22 Effective JSNA and Market Position Statement

The report notes that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Market Position Statement are used well to identify and plan for local care and support services. The CQC refer to clear plans to improve local people's health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities in East Sussex.

3.23 Good oversight of commissioned services

The report indicated commissioning teams had good oversight of commissioned services and provided on-going management, overview of quality and service delivery, and held providers to account for the contract and contained the following: *'Partners told us the local authority's model of commissioning was accessible and supportive of all providers.'*

3.24 Effective Market Support to monitor provider quality.

The Market Support Team maintained knowledge of the provider markets and risk utilising risk assessment tools to provide effective market support including in business continuity situations.

3.25 Strong co-production with people who are experts by experience

The report outlined the many good examples of co-production including work completed by the Involvement Matters Team who are made up of people with Learning Disabilities and are directly involved in service development and staff training, for example *'People told us they had a lot of interaction with the local authority and had been involved with a co-production group who supported with staff training, interviews and produced easy read documents.'*

3.26 Effective partnership working

The report highlighted that partners participated in developing local authority strategies through their involvement in the ASC Strategy Steering Group, Community Oversight Board, Health and Care Partnership Board and the Financial Inclusion Group and indicated that *'Partners told us the local authority valued them, and they had strong links with adult social care and public health'*

3.27 The report referenced our Commissioning Excellence Programme as a good example of developing excellence in local authority / VCFSE commissioning.

Theme 2: Providing Support – Areas for development

3.28 Gap in provision for people with complex and challenging conditions

The report reflected that there is a gap in provision in the county for people with particularly complex and challenging conditions. It is acknowledged that this is not a sole responsibility of ASCH and is being addressed with partners across the system by planning a strategic approach to respond to this challenge.

Theme 3: How the Local Authority ensures safety within the system – Strengths

3.29 Effective case risk management policy with triage by risk level

The CQC noted that there is an effective case risk management policy which is used by all operational staff where referrals are triaged by level of risk. This was supported by practice standards, case monitoring documentation and training.

3.30 Good quality assurance oversight of the independent care sector

The report describes our Market Oversight Panel (MOP) which is a multi-agency two-weekly forum. The forum shares information about the care sector to identify potential risks to people and risks and impacts on the wider market and providers and was identified as a good source of coordinated support to the market.

3.31 Effective transitions charter and pathway for young people to adult services

The CQC concluded that there are suitable processes in place to support young people and their families with the transition to adult social care services. There is a Transitions Charter in place which informs young people and families what they can expect from the process.

3.32 Effective safeguarding

The CQC notes that safeguarding concerns are responded to appropriately, in a timely manner and that there are effective processes for quality assurance oversight of safeguarding. The report refers to the close links with the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) and how learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) was included in relevant staff training.

Theme 3: How the Local Authority ensures safety within the system – Areas for development

3.33 Delays in hospital discharge

The report noted that hospital discharge was not always completed in a timely manner for people mainly due to Discharge to Assess (D2A) capacity. The report acknowledged that the number of D2A beds had reduced due to reductions in NHS funding and capacity was being discussed with system partners.

3.34 Inconsistent sharing of safeguarding enquiry outcomes with providers

The CQC noted that some partners felt that they could be kept better informed about the outcome of safeguarding concerns that they had raised.

3.35 Sharing Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) themes with partners.

Although SAR themes are shared with partners the report suggests this could be done more systematically, but notes that this is a planned action moving forward.

Theme 4: Leadership – Strengths

3.36 Clear governance and accountability structures at all levels

The report outlines the effective use of adult case file audits and our Quality Practice and Assurance Framework (QPAF) to provide information and assurance on the quality of practice in ASCH.

3.37 Effective leadership

The report notes that there is a stable adult social care leadership team with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and indicates that *'Leaders were visible, capable and compassionate' and 'The local authority's political and executive leaders were well informed, and the scrutiny process was effective.'*

3.38 Effective risk management framework and escalation processes

The CQC note that there are effective risk management and escalation arrangements in place.

3.39 Strategic planning informed by performance, risk, and EDI data

The CQC report states, *'The local authority uses information about risks, performance, inequalities and outcomes to inform it's adult social care strategy and plans.'*

3.40 A culture of learning and development

The CQC report states, *'There was an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning, improvement and development.'*

3.41 Strong training and development offer for staff

The report highlights the bespoke training that is aligned with Care Act duties and professional needs, the strong emphasis on reflective practice, peer learning, and legal literacy and

emotional resilience support for staff handling crisis calls, and states *‘Staff told us about the numerous opportunities for career progression and staff development.’*

3.42 The report notes that a strengths-based practice (SBP) model is promoted with a strong emphasis on wellbeing, choice and self-direction.

3.43 Learning from complaints drives service improvement

The CQC note *‘The local authority learned from people’s feedback about their experiences of care and support, and feedback from staff and partners. This informed strategies, improvement activity and decision making at all levels.’*

Theme 4: Leadership – Areas for development

3.44 Prevention strategy still in development

At the time of the assessment in February 2024, the Prevention Strategy, *‘which has a clear focus on prevention and wellbeing to reduce care and support needs’*, was still in development. The CQC noted this was yet to be implemented.

Next steps – response to the key findings

3.45 The key findings from the CQC assessment will be used to review and update our existing development and improvement plans, aligning these with our overarching vision and agreed priorities.

3.46 As many of the development areas highlighted by the CQC were self identified, there is a close alignment with our current Portfolio Plan priorities of Prevention, Waiting Times, Safeguarding, Quality and Value for Money.

3.47 Improvement actions will be delivered through our existing strategies (eg: Waiting Lists Project, Safeguarding Hub in HSCC, etc.) and wider health and care system initiatives (eg: Complex commissioning and market development, delayed discharge reduction) and monitored on a quarterly basis as part of the regular Council Plan progress reporting.

3.48 The strengths outlined in the report show that, overall, East Sussex is in a good position and is delivering well against the challenges and pressures faced by adult social care and our key partners, both locally and nationally.

3.49 As was the case with the LGA Peer Review, our strengths and areas for development were known to us and had been documented in our Self-assessment and / or highlighted in our pre-assessment presentation to the CQC, and most importantly, largely already included within our existing plans and priorities.

3.50 The People Scrutiny Committee, through its CQC Reference Group, assisted in preparations for the assurance process and, as such, are well placed to monitor the development and implementation of our response to the CQC report as part of our wider improvement plan.

4. Ofsted Focused Visit – July 2025

4.1 Ofsted undertook a Focused Inspection of the East Sussex Children’s Services between the 23 and 31 July 2025 (on-site 30 to 31 July). The purpose of this type of inspection is to evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children. For this inspection visit, the theme was:

Children in need or subject to a protection plan, covering:

- Thresholds
- step-up/step-down between children in need and child protection
- children on the edge of care
- children subject to a letter before proceedings and the quality and impact of pre-proceedings interventions, such as family group decision-making meetings
- children in need at risk of family breakdown
- the quality of decisions about entering care
- protection of disabled children

4.2 This visit forms part of the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Our last ILACS was December 2023, where we achieved the overall rating of 'good'.

4.3 Focused visits usually occur between standard and short inspections. ESCC had not had a focused visit within this framework, neither following the ILACS in 2018 nor the ILACS in 2023.

4.4 The report, published on 1 September 2025 is attached at Appendix 13. It can also be viewed using the following link: [East Sussex County Council - Inspection Reports - Ofsted](#).

4.5 This type of visit does not provide an outcome grading but instead sets out key findings within the area of focus or theme, and any associated recommendations.

4.6 The response letter highlights the following key findings:

Children in need in East Sussex, and those who are the subject of a child protection plan, are receiving services that make a positive difference for them and whose effectiveness is being continually developed.

The senior leadership team, with strong corporate support, continues to invest in services for vulnerable children. Leaders have continuously developed and refined services to ensure they have a positive impact on children's lives.

There is a strong focus on providing integrated, multidisciplinary support to children and families. This approach ensures that children and families benefit from consistent, high-quality practice that supports their progress and improves their lives.

There is relentless focus on supporting a stable and committed workforce, enabling staff to develop their skills and feel valued within the council. Leaders are actively creating the right conditions to strengthen social work practice and improve the quality of services for children and families.

4.7 We have received one recommendation for improvement:

The timeliness with which child protection strategy meetings are held, as this is not consistently timely for all children (outcome 3, national framework).

4.8 The findings recognise, however, that this was associated to a small number of children, and where when risks are urgent, the holding of strategy meetings is consistently prioritised. The response letter also noted:

Once held, child protection strategy meetings are attended by the relevant professionals, who appropriately consider the level of risk and the impact on the children involved. There is timely progression to child protection conferences when required.

4.9 East Sussex has maintained a focus on the key priority outcome of keeping vulnerable people safe. The response letter recognises the improvements made following the last ILACS in 2023, in relation to the Public Law Outline, private fostering arrangements and neglect.

4.10 Ofsted also recognised the work to support many children to remain at home, through our connected families approach:

Children on the edge of care but not receiving support through the pre-proceedings process can also benefit from exemplary and transformational support from an integrated multidisciplinary team of social workers, connected coaches and therapists. As a result, many children are supported to remain living at home with their families.

4.11 The visit and the subsequent response letter were resoundingly positive, including the encouraging recognition of leadership and of ESCC as a reflective and improvement driven local authority:

Leaders have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development. The local authority's self-evaluation is reflective and demonstrates a commitment to learning, developing social work practice, and responding to areas where development is needed. This understanding has been used by the Director of Children's Services and her wider leadership team to drive ongoing improvement in the quality and impact of services for children.

KEITH GLAZIER, OBE
(Chair)

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REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Governance Committee met on 24 September, 21 October and 11 November 2025. Attendance:

Councillors Glazier, OBE (Chair) (3), Bennett (3), Bowdler (3), Collier (3), Denis (3) and Tutt (3).

1. Amendment to the Constitution – Access to Information Procedure Rules

1.1. The Constitution sets out a requirement to publish an annual notice regarding the Forward Plan in at least one newspaper circulating in the area of the local authority. This requirement stems from legislation that has been repealed and as such this provision is not necessary and serves no practical purpose.

1.2. The Leader of the County Council continues to prepare a Forward Plan which is published on the Council's website on the last working day of the month detailing decisions including Key Decisions to be taken in the forthcoming 4 months in accordance with Regulations.

1.3. The Constitution is kept under review, and the most recent review has identified an out-of-date requirement which is no longer required and serves no practical purpose, and which it is therefore recommended be deleted.

1.4. Proposed amendments to the Constitution are set out at Appendix 1 of this report.

1.5. This recommended amendment to the Constitution will not alter or affect the contents of or the way in which the Forward Plan is published

1.6. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ approve the amendment to the Access to Information Procedure Rules as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ❖ agree that the Constitution be amended accordingly.

2. Amendment to the Constitution – Budget Setting Meeting

2.1. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 sets out the Council's legal obligation to set an annual balanced or 'fully funded' budget prior to 11 March for the forthcoming financial year. Failure to set a budget by this date could have significant financial, administrative and legal implications and incur reputational harm for the Council.

2.2. The responsibility for determining the Council's budget rests with Full Council. Ahead of consideration by Full Council, Cabinet agrees at its meeting in January its recommendations to Full Council with regard to the draft Council Plan, revenue budget and capital programme for the following financial year. At its subsequent meeting in February each year, Full Council then debates the Cabinet's proposed budget and determines whether to adopt it in its proposed form or whether to agree an amended budget.

2.3. With regard to proposed amendments to the budget, Members wishing to move an amendment to the revenue budget or capital programme are encouraged to consult the relevant Chief Officer and the Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer) prior to moving the amendments, and where possible prior to the meeting. Members are able to propose amendments at any time, provided they are seconded. The current arrangement therefore leaves little time to consider the implications of the proposed amendments and for advice to be provided to Members.

2.4. In support of this report, research was undertaken into the budget amendment procedures practiced by other local authorities. This indicated that there are varying approaches regarding the rules for when and how Members propose budget amendments. Neighbouring authorities, such as West Sussex County Council and Surrey County Council, do not specify the amendment process within their Constitutions and instead utilise an informal procedure comparable to the current approach adopted by ESCC. Whilst there is no consensus, it is the case that the majority of council's reviewed for this report do require budget amendments to be submitted prior to the budget setting meeting of their Councils.

2.5. Where authorities do engage a formalised process there is consensus that amendments must be submitted in writing and receive approval prior to circulation.

2.6. The S151 Officer carries responsibility for managing the Council's finances, including:

- ensuring that the budget submitted to Council for approval is balanced and soundly based;
- ensuring that all spend is fully and openly accounted for; and,

- ensuring that all decisions and commitments by the Council have clear financial implications set out and understood.

2.7. As such stipulating that the S151 Officer has approval of budget amendments ensures that proposals taken to Full Council are financially viable prior to Members debating whether they should be adopted.

2.8. In a majority of the local authorities researched, the amendments proposed by Members are circulated to Full Council in advance of the meeting. The increased visibility of proposed amendments helps ensure that it is possible for officers to ensure that the proposal is viable and facilitates a stronger level of scrutiny and debate at the Full Council meetings.

2.9. It is therefore proposed to alter the process for tabling amendments so that Members would be required to submit budget proposals in writing to the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer 3 clear working days in advance of the budget setting meeting. Proposals would then require S151 Officer approval prior to circulation to Members ahead of the budget meeting. Any proposals received less than 3 clear working days before the meeting would not be accepted and therefore not considered at the meeting, unless agreed by the Chief Finance Officer. This rule would only apply when Cabinet does not seek to make changes to its budget recommendations prior to Full Council consideration.

2.10. As with questions from the public which are also circulated after the publication of the Council papers, budget amendments would be published as a supplement to the agenda.

2.11. It is proposed that Part 4, Part 3 Budget and Policy Framework of the Constitution is updated to ensure that the governance process is robust and is reflective of the changed environment and the Council's financial position. The revised process will enable greater oversight on amendments, for their implications to be properly considered and for effective support to be provided to Members on budget setting decisions.

2.12. The revisions to the Constitution outlining the proposed process are set out at Appendix 2.

2.13. The governance route for proposed amendments to budgets has been reviewed in light of the evolving financial and political environment of the Council. This is to enable those advising members to have sufficient time to make sure that the implications of the amendments are properly understood and help ensure that Members are able to make informed financial decisions.

2.14. It is recommended to formalise the amendment process by requiring that all proposed budget amendments be submitted in writing to both the s151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer 3 clear working days prior to the budget setting meeting. Should an amendment be received after this date it would not be allowed to proceed unless that CFO agreed it could, this is to ensure that where a situation arises such as late confirmation of Government funding late amendments can be made.

2.15. To formalise the budget amendment process, it is being recommended to alter the Constitution to include the additions outlined in Appendix 2 to clarify the route for proposals.

2.16. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ agree the proposed process for presenting Budget Amendments to Full Council as set out in paragraph 2.9 of the report;
- ❖ agree the proposed amendments to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
- ❖ agree that this process only applies when Cabinet makes no changes to its budget recommendations prior to Full Council consideration, and
- ❖ agree to update the Constitution accordingly

3. Scrutiny Call-in Process

3.1. The Local Government Act 2000 provides for the scrutiny of decisions once they have been made but before they have been implemented. This part of scrutiny committees' wider overview and scrutiny role is generally referred to as 'call-in'.

3.2. The process that is to be followed is set out in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules within the County Council's Constitution. A summary of the process set out is attached at Appendix 3.

3.3. Since November 2024 there have been four call-in requests requiring the procedure to be invoked. In the course of these requests being made and responded to, a number of queries and requests for information about the process have been received from Members, indicating that they would find additional clarity and guidance beneficial. Consequently, the views of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs Group have been sought on the current process and what could be done to provide clarification and guidance.

3.4. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs supported the provision of further written guidance for Members and recommended the development of a checklist which would navigate Members through the procedure as set out in the Constitution whilst retaining Members' ability to lead the call-in process.

3.5. The checklist, which has been reviewed and endorsed by the Chairs and Vice Chairs Group and the Committee, was approved by the Governance Committee at its meeting on 21 October. The content is closely aligned to the considerations and procedure set out in the Constitution. Some additional clarification was included, with a view to how the Constitution should be interpreted including:

- a deadline of 4pm on the final day of the call-in window for a request to be submitted to the Deputy Chief Executive – this is to ensure there is clarity about the deadline and that requests are received during working hours;
- that each Member wishing to support a call-in request confirms this (ahead of the 4pm deadline) individually by email, for the avoidance of doubt as to whether a Member wishes to support a call-in request; and
- as requested by the Chairs and Vice Chairs Group, that Members considering a call-in request should inform their group leader (where relevant) to support a role for group leaders, as well as officers, in communications and advice on a potential call-in, particularly where the grounds are less clear.

3.6. The checklist is available on the Councillors' intranet area, or by email or hard copy on request, and can be completed electronically.

3.7. At the Governance Committee meeting on 21 October, a proposal to extend the call-in period from 4 to 5 days was moved and seconded to allow Members more time for submissions. The Governance Committee resolved to recommend the County Council to change the call-in period from 4 days to 5 days as outlined in Part 4, Rules of Procedure in the Constitution as set out in Appendix 4.

3.8. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ agree a change to the call-in period from 4 days to 5 days; and
- ❖ agree that the constitution be amended accordingly.

4. Customer Experience Annual Report

4.1. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) launched a new Complaint Handling Code (the Code) in February 2024 in order to provide a single standard for complaint handling by local councils in areas not already covered by statutory complaint processes. In response, the Customer Experience Board has developed a new Complaints Policy for East Sussex County Council in order to adhere to the Code. The new Complaints Policy was adopted by the Governance Committee at its meeting on 21 October and is presented as Appendix 5.

4.2. The new policy will be implemented on 1 January 2026 for the Council. The LGSCO plans to apply the Code to its processes from 1 April 2026.

4.3. The new Code recommends a role of ‘Member Responsible for Complaints’ (the Member). This role has responsibility for complaints and to support a positive complaint handling culture in the Council. This role can be carried out by an individual or committee depending on the governance arrangements already in place. The ‘Member’ should receive information on complaints that provides insight on the Council’s complaint handling performance.

4.4. It has been included in the new Complaints Policy (Appendix 5), that the Committee be the ‘Member Responsible for Complaints’, as this reflects the governance arrangements already in place, with the Committee already receiving the Customer Experience Annual Report, which provides insight on the Council’s complaint handling performance.

4.5. As outlined in the Code, the ‘Member’ should receive updates on volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; and also reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling. These should be provided in an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, which for the Council, is already provided in this Customer Experience Annual Report.

4.6. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ agree the amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Governance Committee to include that the Governance Committee undertakes the role of “Member Responsible for Complaints” in order to comply with the LGSCO Code as set out in Appendix 6 to this report; and
- ❖ agree that the constitution be amended accordingly.

5. Appointment of Returning Officer for Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) election

5.1. The paper recommends that the Chief Executive of Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) be formally appointed as the Combined County Authority Returning Officer (CCARO) for the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) elections scheduled for May 2026. It sets out the legislative background, governance context, and rationale for the proposed appointment.

5.2. The MCCA is being established as part of the Government’s devolution agenda, with the Sussex region comprising East Sussex County Council (ESCC), West Sussex County Council (WSSC), and BHCC working collaboratively to form the new authority. The MCCA will assume strategic responsibilities across transport, housing, economic development, and public service reform.

5.3. Legislation to formally create the MCCA is expected to be passed in early 2026, with the first mayoral election scheduled for May 2026.

5.4. The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 (the Order) require that an officer be appointed as the CCARO responsible for the effectual conduct of the election in the manner provided by the Order.

5.5. Under the Order all expenditure properly incurred by a Returning Officer prior to the formal establishment of the CCA must be paid by the constituent councils. Once the CCA is established, it must reimburse those councils.

5.6. The CCARO is personally responsible for a number of specific aspects of the combined county authority mayoral election including:

- giving notice of the election
- the nomination procedures
- encouraging participation
- ensuring that candidates and their agents comply with the requirements as to the content of candidate election addresses, and with the procedures for submitting them
- producing and distributing the booklet containing the candidates' election addresses to every voter
- the collation of local totals and calculation of the result
- the declaration of the result

5.7. Provisions in the 2017 order set out that the CCARO must be an officer of a constituent council or the CCA and that the appointment of the CCARO must be made by the constituent councils or the CCA.

5.8. The Election Regulations permit the appointment by the Constituent Councils of a CCARO for the mayoral election ahead of the establishment of a combined county authority. It is proposed that the Chief Executive of BHCC be appointed to this role.

5.9. As the MCCA will not yet be legally constituted at the time the Returning Officer must be appointed, the responsibility falls to the constituent authorities.

5.10. There is a requirement for the Constituent Authorities to appoint a CCARO and it is recommended that this be the Chief Executive of BHCC. BHCC has already taken a lead role in coordinating the preparations for the mayoral election, including oversight of the Election Spend & Reimbursement Policy and logistical planning. The BHCC electoral services team has delivered the Area Returning Officer responsibilities at the last two Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner elections, has extensive experience managing large-scale elections and is therefore well-equipped to handle the complexities of a regional mayoral election.

5.11. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ agree to appoint the Chief Executive of Brighton and Hove City Council as the Returning Officer for the Mayoral election for the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority.

6. Members' Allowance Scheme

6.1. East Sussex County Council operates a Members' Allowance Scheme, which outlines the types of remuneration and support available to elected Members for their responsibilities and duties. The scheme includes payments for basic allowances, special responsibilities, and covers travel, subsistence, and other expenses related to official Council business. These allowances are set to compensate Members for time spent and obligations carried out during their roles as representatives of the County Council.

6.2. In March 2013, the Council agreed that the Scheme would be reviewed every four years. The most recent full review took place in March 2022, and so the next review is scheduled for 2026.

6.3. It is a requirement under the Regulations that the Council appoints an Independent Remuneration Panel to review the Member Scheme of Allowances and make recommendations to the Council on Councillor allowances.

6.4. Set out in the Scheme is a mechanism which allows for annual adjustments to the scheme in between the full scheme reviews. For the past four years, annual increases in basic and special responsibility allowances have been indexed to the percentage increase in the salaries of managers on locally negotiated pay. This ensures that annual adjustments reflect the pay awards issued to LMG managers. It is a legal requirement that this adjustment mechanism is reviewed every four years.

6.5. As Members will be aware, the Council has submitted a proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to Government, the outcome of which is not known at this stage, and we expect the Government to make a decision in March 2026. If approved, LGR will result in a unitary council and will lead to potentially significant changes to the roles and functions of Members, which it is anticipated will impact on the Members Scheme of Allowances.

6.6. The process for conducting a full review of the Member Scheme of Allowances for implementation in April 2026 is detailed and would require starting in December 2025. The review would also involve incurring cost.

6.7. Bearing in mind the current proposal for LGR, which if agreed would have a potentially significant impact on the role of members and would include a review of members allowances as part of the process, it is proposed that the review currently scheduled for 2026 be postponed with view to the process starting in 2027 ahead of implementation for vesting day in 2028. Should however Government decided not to

proceed with LGR then a review will be carried out and reported to Council in the autumn 2026.

6.8. In the meantime the annual adjustment mechanism will be reviewed in line with the legal requirements.

6.9. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ agree to postpone the full review of the Member Scheme of Allowances scheduled for 2026, with a view to the process commencing in 2027 ahead of the implementation for the Vesting Day in 2028; and
- ❖ agree that should Government not proceed with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), then a review be carried out and reported to Council in the autumn of 2026.

7. Amendment to the Constitution – Speaking to the Planning Committee

7.1. The Constitution includes procedure and guidance for Speaking to the Planning Committee within Part 4 (Rules of Procedure).

7.2. The Constitution is kept under review, and the most recent review has identified a need to make changes in relation to which members can speak at Planning Committee as a Local Member.

7.3. Planning Committee considers planning applications and Traffic Regulation Orders which fall within specific electoral divisions. Local County Councillors for the specific electoral divisions are invited to speak at meetings of the Planning Committee to raise points on behalf of their electoral division, often putting forward views of the residents and businesses within the division.

7.4. Where the local County Councillor is unable to attend a meeting of the Planning Committee where an item within their division is being considered, they can submit their views to the Planning Committee in writing ahead of the meeting however there is not express provision to enable them to nominate an alternative County Councillor to speak at Planning Committee to represent the views of their division in their place.

7.5. It is therefore proposed that the procedure and guidance for Speaking at Planning Committee is amended to expressly include provision in relation to this. So that in the event that a local County Councillor cannot attend, for reasons which may include, but are not limited to, illness or where a local County Councillor considers they have a prejudicial interest, the Local County Councillor (or Group Leader in their absence) can nominate an alternative County Councillor to speak at the Planning Committee meeting in their place, thereby ensuring that the views of those residents and businesses in division are heard.

7.6. Proposed amendments to the Constitution are set out at Appendix 7 of this report.

7.7. This recommended amendment to the Constitution will allow for elected Local Member representation at Planning Committee meetings in the event that the Local Member cannot attend; and will help ensure that the views of residents and businesses are heard. The review also identified some presentational issues which do not change the rules but will ensure that the guidance is set out in a more accessible format.

7.8. The Committee recommends the County Council to:

- ❖ agree the proposed amendments to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 7 of the report;
- ❖ agree that the reason for a member standing in for the local member should be recorded in the official minutes of the meeting;
- ❖ agree that a monitoring report setting out the use of the provision be brought back to the Governance Committee in six months' time for review; and
- ❖ agree that the constitution be amended accordingly;

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, 4 September 2025.

Councillors Evans (Chair), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Asaduzzaman, Azad, Dowling, Hill, Hollidge Maples, Marlow-Eastwood, O'Quinn, Osborne, Redstone, Scott, Shing, Theobald 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. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2025/26 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 TO 2029/30 MONITORING AT MONTH 4 (END JULY)

- 1.1 The Fire Authority received a report presenting the findings of month 4 monitoring undertaken on the Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/26 – 2029/30. The report set out a forecast net revenue underspend to the sum of £174,000 resulting from a combination of underspends and pressures across the Service as set out in the report. Due to the overall underspend position, there was no requirement to draw down £512,000 from the General Reserve as had been planned. Staffing and overtime forecasts were reviewed as part of the budget monitoring process, but it remained difficult to predict with certainty overtime and on-call costs and further movement could occur through the year.
- 1.2 The current year Capital Budget had been approved at £9,553,000 and was updated to £10,912,000 including slippage brought forward from 2024/25. Officers had reviewed the capital plans for 2025/26 and report slippage of 23% on delivery of projects. The Authority's reserves showed an opening balance of £11,578,000. The forecast net drawdown was £4,740,000 an increase of £1,116,000 compared to the planned drawdown of £3,624,000 resulting in an estimated closing balance of £6,838,000. Work was ongoing to review likely drawdown of reserves (including grants brought forward) for the rest of the current year on both Revenue and Capital projects. The Authority currently had cash investments of £22,700,000, with borrowing at £9,015,00 with loans subject to fixed interest rates. Loans totalling £525,000 were due to be repaid during the year. Additional borrowing of £5,685,000 was expected to fund the capital programme, although if the cashflow position allowed then long-term borrowing would be avoided.
- 1.3 Members were satisfied with increased loans to other Local Authorities but remained keen to see increased use of ESG investments. There had been a change to the Treasury Management approach in part as the overall level of balances reduced to move away from larger deposits with financial institutions and a focus more on smaller loans to Local Authorities where the returns were more favourable. Opportunities for ESG products were regularly reviewed but, where those products met our requirements, they either required larger sums to be invested or did not have comparable rates to non ESG products. The Authority agreed the recommendations of the report in full.

2. 2026/27 TO 2030/31 STRATEGIC SERVICE PLANNING AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

- 2.1 The Authority were given an update on the financial planning position in advance of the start of the Service Planning and Budget Setting process for 2026/27 onwards. The report set out the financial context and explained that the fundamental aim of the process was to deliver the Authority's purpose and commitments, the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and its associated targets and priorities with the estimate of available financial resources for 2026/27 to 2030/31. The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), announced in spring 2025, set out revenue funding allocations for each Government Department for the next three years, there had been no mention of Fire precept limits, but modelling suggested up to £5 would continue to be permitted. The Fairer Funding Review 2.0 planned for multi-year settlements, grant simplification, and less competitive bidding, and proposed changes to the Settlement Funding Assessment. Modelling suggested the Government grant for standalone Fire & Rescue Authorities (FRA) would reduce by more than 4% over the next three years, equating to a loss of £102m nationally.
- 2.2 Nationally the sector remained reliant on significant one-off funding for investment in protection services and payment of employer's pension contributions, there had been no confirmation from Government that these would continue, but the working assumption was that they would, on a cash flat basis. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was expected in December 2025, modelling from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) indicated that our Settlement Funding Assessment would reduce by in excess of 3% per year, a total loss of 9.9% or £1.6m over the three-year period. This was a material and unacceptable reduction in funding, the equivalent of twenty-five wholetime firefighter roles. The budget gap would be dependent on the level of precept set by the Authority with savings required by 2028/29 of between £3.157m (£5) and £4.587m (3%). The Authority would need to continue to identify unavoidable pressures, growth bids, and savings sufficient to balance the budget in 2026/27 and beyond, but it was clear that efficiencies, low impact savings, and reprioritisation of capital investment plans alone would be insufficient. Savings on the scale of the modelling would inevitably mean that the Authority will have to consider reducing its community offer and the impact this would have on the CRMP 2025-30.
- 2.3 Members appreciated the extensive and robust lobbying of Government, direct to local MPs and Ministers and responses to national consultations and remained keen to support this. The NFCC had strengthened its language with articles and publications being more pointed than previously with regards to the reduction in funding of the Fire Sector. A plan was needed to support the delivery of services against the reduction of funding, the CRMP 2025-30 would be presented for approval in February 2026 and would set out an approach to the Service's ways of working which would allow the offer to be maintained, but it was important to consider better ways our services could be delivered. The Fire Authority agreed the recommendations of the report in full.

3. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2025-30

- 3.1 The Fire Authority considered a report seeking approval to commence a public consultation on the draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-30. The CRMP is the key planning document describing how the Service plans keep residents, and those who work in or travel through the area, safe over the next five years. It describes the main risks to our communities and how the Service proposes to use available resources efficiently to reduce or mitigate those risks. The draft CRMP contains proposals which ensure continuous improvement in how the Service delivers across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.
- 3.2 An effort had been made to make the document more reader friendly, the content was as simple as possible, and a new layout had been introduced. The draft document linked Service priorities to proposed activities and set out the community offer, including the implications of any changes. The Authority were reminded that the CRMP was how the Service identified risk and vulnerabilities in our communities and set out how we would use our services to support them. There were changes being seen in our built environment, heritage data, health information, and all of these meant that we needed to adapt our services to address them, some changes meant that there were challenges to our workload. The CRMP had been designed to be a live document and that meant that the Authority was better able to revisit it in the event of significant changes to funding or other risks.
- 3.3 Members thanked Officers for a very comprehensive document and felt that the layout made it clear and engaging for the public. There was a real hope that that there would be a strong level of response to the consultation. The Authority agreed to the recommendations of the report in full.

4. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2025-30 - CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION PLAN

- 4.1 The Fire Authority considered a report presenting the Consultation and Communication Plan for the forthcoming Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-30 for approval. The consultation and communications plan had been shaped in accordance with national requirements and guided by the Gunning principles (four legal tests for public consultation), the ESFRS Communications, Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2024-27, the NFCC CRMP Strategic Framework and the Fire Standards Board guidance on CRMP. The consultation would be undertaken by an independent consultation service provider Opinion Research Services (ORS) and consisted of the following areas:

- online open questionnaire
- online stakeholder forum
- direct emailing of businesses, community groups, parish councils, landlords and recent service users
- staff information events and communications; and
- communications through social media, press and publicity.

The consultation would be open for 8 weeks, from 5 September 2025, after which the results would be evaluated by ORS and used to refine the draft CRMP. Once updated the final draft would return before the Fire Authority at its meeting on 12 February 2026 for consideration and approval.

- 4.2 Members thanked officers for their work on both plans and were keen to support the consultation process to ensure a high response rate, offers were made to attend events, share links and include details of the consultation in their own communications to residents. The Fire Authority approved the consultation and communication plan including the proposed 8-week consultation period.

COUNCILLOR AMANDA EVANS
CHAIR OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

4 September 2025

REPORT OF URGENT DECISIONS

1. Local Government Reorganisation

1.1 The Chairman agreed that the decision taken by the Cabinet at a meeting on 24 September 2025 was urgent. The Cabinet RESOLVED to:

- 1) Approve the submission of the business case setting out the proposal for a single unitary council for East Sussex, based on a Continuing Authority model, (Appendix 1 of the report) to Government by 26 September 2025;
- 2) Agree to request Government to cancel or postpone the county council elections scheduled to be held in May 2026;
- 3) Delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, authority to finalise and submit the business case setting out the proposal and a covering letter formally requesting the cancellation or postponement of the county elections and for the County Council to have Continuing Authority status; and
- 4) Note the next steps in the process.

1.2 The urgency arose because deadlines had been imposed by Central Government, which were outside the Council's control. After the statutory invitation on 5 February 2025, considerable work had been undertaken in partnership with the District and Borough Councils to arrive at an agreed interim plan. The proposal, which had been developed collaboratively with District and Borough Councils across East Sussex, each of whom were making decisions around the same time, was finalised in September. It was therefore not possible to hold a Cabinet meeting early enough to allow for a decision to be called in and for a scrutiny committee meeting to be convened to consider the call-in, while still meeting the Government's deadline of 26 September 2025.

COUNCILLOR ROY GALLEY
(Chairman of the Council)

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