

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held on 27 January 2026 at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes

PRESENT Councillors Keith Glazier, OBE (Chair), Nick Bennett (Vice Chair), Bob Bowdler, Penny di Cara, Claire Dowling, Carl Maynard and Bob Standley.

Members spoke on the items indicated

Councillor Bennett	- Items 5 and 7 (minutes 52 and 54)
Councillor Collier	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Denis	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Claire Dowling	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Field	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Galley	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Glazier	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Standley	- Item 5 (minute 52)
Councillor Tutt	- Item 5 (minute 52)

48. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2025

48.1 The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16 December 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

49.1 There were none.

50. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

50.1 There were none.

51. REPORTS

51.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

52. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR): DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN 2026/27, REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

52.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Executive together with a summary of the consultation meeting held with Trade Unions which was received after publication of the Cabinet agenda.

52.2 It was RESOLVED to:

1) Recommend the County Council to:

- i) Approve in principle the draft Council Plan 2026/27 at Appendix 1 of the report and authorise the Chief Executive to finalise the Plan in consultation with the relevant Lead Members;
- ii) Increase Council Tax by 2.99% in 2026/27;
- iii) Increase the Adult Social Care Precept by 2% in 2026/27;
- iv) Issue precepts to be paid by borough and district councils in accordance with the agreed schedule of instalments at Appendix 5 (draft) of the report;
- v) Approve the net Revenue Budget estimate of £693.2m for 2026/27 set out in Appendix 2 (Medium Term Financial Plan) and Appendix 3 (draft) (Budget Summary) of the report and authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, Leader and Deputy Leader, to make adjustments to the presentation of the Budget Summary to reflect the final settlement and final budget decisions;
- vi) Note that the Council has written to Government to request Exceptional Financial Support in the form of a £70m capitalisation direction to support the budget in 2026/27;
- vii) Amend the Treasury Management Strategy, as set out separately on the agenda, to allow borrowing to fund the revenue budget;
- viii) Note the comments of the Chief Finance Officer on budget risks and robustness, as set out in Appendix 6 of the report;
- ix) Agree the Reserves Policy set out in Appendix 6 of the report;
- x) Approve the Capital Strategy and Programme at Appendix 8 of the report;
- xi) Note progress with the Council Plan and Budget 2025/26 since quarter 2 set out in section 4 of the report;
- xii) Note the Medium Term Financial Plan forecast for 2026/27 to 2028/29, set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
- xiii) Note the comments from engagement exercises set out in Appendix 7 of the report; and
- xiv) Note the schedule of fees and charges that have increased above 4% at Appendix 9 of the report.

2) Agree to continue lobbying as strongly as possible for sustainable funding to meet the needs of East Sussex residents, using all available avenues.

3) Approve the Highways investment in advance as set out in section 10 of the report.

Reasons

52.3 Factors beyond local control driving increased costs, and national funding reforms which have failed to recognise the growing needs of East Sussex's population in funding allocations, mean our income is no longer sufficient to meet basic operating requirements. This is the case even after asking local people to continue to contribute through a Council Tax rise in line with Government assumptions. The recommendation to make a further increase is not made lightly, given that many household budgets continue to be under pressure, but it is essential given the funding gap we face. Support will continue to be available through local Council Tax Support Schemes for those residents eligible and we will continue to work with partners to signpost local people to sources of support with the cost of living, including access to benefits they may be entitled to.

52.4 Our tried and tested RPPR process will enable us to direct the substantial budgets we continue to deploy as effectively as possible towards priorities, in particular protecting services for the most vulnerable in our county as far as we can. We continue to invest significantly to maintain vital services and to ensure we capitalise on the opportunities presented by new technologies to get more from the resources we have. We will maintain our strong record of financial discipline and our focus on evidence-based approaches which maximise outcomes and make best use of resources.

53. DEVOLUTION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF MAYORAL COMBINED COUNTY AUTHORITY

53.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Executive.

53.2 It was RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the changes announced by the Minister to the proposal to devolve to Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority, in the letter of 4 December 2025;
- 2) Reconfirm the approval of and consent to the establishment of the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority;
- 3) Delegate authority to the County Council's Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to agree the contents of, and consent to, the making of the Sussex and Brighton Combined Authority Order 2026; and
- 4) Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to take such action as necessary to give effect to the above recommendations and to facilitate the establishment of the Combined County Authority.

Reasons

53.3 Members will be familiar with the issues around Devolution and the proposed establishment of the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority having received a previous report seeking consent. The report set out the update and the changes in relation to the timings of its implementation and the election of a mayor.

53.4 Notwithstanding the proposed changes, Devolution and the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) could bring major benefits to the region. The Government has committed to a £38m annual investment fund over 30 years (£1.14bn) for agreed priorities, aiming to drive economic growth, support employment, and improve local services. The Bill also devolves new powers over transport, housing, and adult skills for more local decision-making.

53.5 Certain powers and responsibilities currently managed by East Sussex County Council will shift to the newly formed MCCA, fostering strategic cooperation on important regional matters like infrastructure and workforce development. While the election of the mayor and devolution of some powers will now be delayed the MCCA remains able to assist and strengthen partnerships across Sussex.

53.6 In order for consent to be given in a timely manner and within the timescales set by Government it is necessary to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to agree to the Statutory Instrument and to take any action needed to enact the recommendations and facilitate the establishment of the MCCA.

54. AUDITOR'S ANNUAL (VALUE FOR MONEY) REPORT ON EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL 2024/25

54.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Finance Officer.

54.2 It was RESOLVED to note the report.

Reason

54.3 The Annual (Value for Money) Report for 2024/25 in recognising the significant Financial Sustainability challenge the authority faces, has been able to provide positive assurance around Governance and Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. One key recommendation has been reported and responded to by management.

55. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2026/27

55.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Finance Officer.

55.2 It was RESOLVED to recommend to the County Council to:

- 1) Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2026/27;
- 2) Approve the Annual Investment Strategy for 2026/27;
- 3) Approve the Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2026/27 to 2028/29;
- 4) Approve the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement for 2025/26 and 2026/27 at Appendix 1 of the report (Section 3).

Reason

55.3 The report fulfils the requirement to submit an annual/half yearly report in the form prescribed in the Treasury Management Code of Practice. The policy sets out the acceptable limits on ratings, investment periods, amounts to be invested and the borrowing strategy. The financial position is kept under constant review and if at any time it is felt that any of these limits represent an unacceptable risk appropriate and immediate action will be taken accordingly.

56. THE CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST 2025/26 FORECAST OUTTURN POSITION AND UPDATED MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN INCLUDING THE 2026/27 BUDGET

56.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Operating Officer.

56.2 It was RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the Quarter 2 budget position for the Conservators' 2025/26 Core Budget.
- 2) Note the Conservators of Ashdown Forest medium term financial plan.
- 3) Approve the 2026/27 Core Budget.

Reasons

56.3 The report sets out the financial position of the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest (COAF) for 2025/26, against the approved budget agreed by the Board of Conservators at their meeting on 17 November 2024 and presented to Cabinet in January 2025.

56.4 The current 2025/26 Core budget projections indicate that no additional contribution from East Sussex County Council will be required.

56.5 The current Countryside Stewardship (CS) budget is forecast to overspend by £88,589 this year. This is more than the budgeted overspend of £24,726. The forecast assumes a CS funding gap from January to March 2026. However Natural England have just announced an extension of the funding which should reduce the forecast 2025/26 overspend.

57. TO AGREE WHICH ITEMS ARE TO BE REPORTED TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL

It was agreed that items 5, 8 and 9 should be reported to the County Council.

[Note: the items being reported to County Council refer to minute numbers 52, 55 and 56]