

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2026

10.30 am COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)
Councillors Kathryn Field (Vice Chair), Colin Belsey, Charles Clark,
Anne Cross, Nuala Geary, Stephen Shing, Colin Swansborough, John Ungar
and Trevor Webb

Maria Cowler, Roman Catholic Diocese Representative
John Hayling, Parent Governor Representative
Lesley Hurst, Diocese of Chichester Representative

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the previous meeting (*Pages 3 - 10*)
2. Apologies for absence
3. Disclosures of interests
Disclosures by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
4. Urgent items
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgent.
5. Healthy Ageing Scrutiny Review (*Pages 11 - 28*)
6. Work programme (*Pages 29 - 54*)
7. Scrutiny Review of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport (*Pages 55 - 86*)
8. SEND update (*Pages 87 - 124*)
9. East Sussex Education Attainment and Performance (*Pages 125 - 150*)
10. Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report (*Pages 151 - 158*)
11. Any other items previously notified under agenda item 4

PHILIP BAKER
Deputy Chief Executive
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent
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4 March 2026

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PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 20 November 2025.

PRESENT Councillors Johanna Howell (Chair), Kathryn Field (Vice Chair), Colin Belsey, Anne Cross, John Ungar, Matthew Beaver, Chris Dowling and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative)

Lesley Hurst, Diocese of Chichester Representative attended online.

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families
Councillor Bob Standley, Lead Member for Education, and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability
Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health (attended online)

ALSO PRESENT Carolyn Fair Director of Children's Services
Ian Gutsell Chief Finance Officer
Mark Stainton Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Douglass Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance (online)
Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

17. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2025

17.1 The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September as a correct record.

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

18.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Geary and Swansborough. Lesley Hurst attended the meeting online.

19. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

19.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

20. URGENT ITEMS

20.1 There were no urgent items.

21. RECONCILING POLICY PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

21.1 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) introduced the report which incorporated the recent RPPR Cabinet report which provided an update on the policy context, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), capital programme, and the Council's response to significant financial pressures. The report presented a further opportunity for the Committee to ask questions on the planning context and to request any additional information required for the RPPR Board in December.

21.2 The Director of ASCH outlined that pressures continued to be significant and ASCH's priorities to respond to these challenges remained unchanged.

21.3 The Director of Children's Services (CSD) outlined the key pressures in CSD, including rising demand for services and an increase in complex needs, growth in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which in turn increased Home to School Transport (HTST) costs. National reforms, including the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy and the awaited Schools White Paper, which was anticipated to include significant reforms to SEND, were focussed on early intervention and prevention and this would continue to drive the Department's response to these pressures and meeting need.

21.4 The Chief Finance Officer outlined the financial position of the Council as detailed in the report, including the stark financial challenge, with a revenue deficit of £55m, an update on the capital programme, and the insufficient reserves needed to meet the deficit. The report also set out key information awaited from Government, with a Policy Statement expected imminently in response to the Fair Funding Review 2.0. The report outlined the next steps to set a balanced budget, including preparations needed to apply for Exceptional Financial Support and a request to seek further savings. The CIPFA review had provided assurance of good financial management and governance in the Council and noted a clear understanding of the challenges across Members and officers.

21.5 The Committee asked the following questions:

- **Crowborough site funding:** The Committee asked about funding implications if the Home Office proposal to house asylum seekers at a former army training camp in Crowborough proceeds, particularly in regard to safeguarding responsibilities. The Director of ASCH confirmed no discussions on funding had taken place and any local funding would be for the Home Office to agree with district and borough councils. Statutory duties would mostly be limited to Public Health and infection prevention and control, with minimal anticipated Care Act responsibilities. The welfare, care and support of individuals was the responsibility of the Home Office to resource on site. Although the Council had a responsibility to safeguard vulnerable adults, recent experiences of housing asylum seekers in hotels in the county suggested there would be robust internal safeguarding procedures in place.
- **Service costs** – The Committee sought assurance that efforts were being made to keep costs of services down, particularly for services experiencing inflated costs due to high demand and low competition. The Director of CSD responded that work was underway regionally and nationally to manage the care market and ensure value for money, including through the regional care co-operative. The Director of ASCH reiterated a similar approach in ASCH and commented that for older people's care the Council was able to publish its own rates and for working age adults, a care funding calculator was used to support with fee negotiations. There was also work underway across Sussex to grow the market for adults with complex needs with the aim of reducing costs and providing quality care locally.

21.6 The Committee noted the information that was awaited from Government and agreed to hold a further discussion when more detail would be available at its RPPR Board in December.

21.7 The Committee RESOLVED to note the information in the attached RPPR Cabinet report of 11 November 2025.

22. EAST SUSSEX SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (ESSCP) ANNUAL REPORT

22.1 The Director of Children's Services introduced the report which outlined work of the Partnership during 24/25. The report detailed changes to the partnership arrangements, including strengthened education involvement and that the new education subgroup had been cited by the Department for Education as an example of good practice. The core function of the Partnership remained to provide leadership to all agencies, critical thinking and professional

challenge, embedding a culture of continuous learning, oversight and assurance on single and multi-agency safeguarding practice. The report set out key achievements, including training, case reviews and multi-agency audits; safeguarding priorities for 2025/26, including safeguarding in education, safeguarding adolescents and learning and development; the development of ESSCP scrutiny, with the recruitment of young scrutineers; and an ongoing focus on strengthening quality assurance.

22.3 The Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance reiterated that there had a period of change within the ESSCP but that it remained a mature and effective partnership.

22.4 The Committee welcomed the report and thanked officers for their work. The involvement of lay people and young people was also welcomed.

22.5 The Committee asked questions in the following areas:

- **Digital safety** – The Committee raised concerns about online bullying, artificial intelligence (AI), and emerging technologies, asking what strategies were in place to keep children safe. The Director explained that this remained a key and evolving priority. Training was provided to school leaders to manage risks linked to bullying, anxiety, attendance, and decisions by some parents to electively home educate (EHE). However, the complexity of these issues required a whole-system response. Many schools now had roles dedicated to AI and digital strategy to identify opportunities and manage risks. The Director emphasised the importance of understanding young people's relationship with digital technology and AI, noting that while risks exist, many young people report feeling safer online. The Committee discussed recent examples of banning smartphones in schools; the Lead Member for Education and ISEND commented that such measures were often ineffective, as students find workarounds. The Director reiterated the need to engage young people in these discussions, particularly in light of concerns about future job opportunities.
- **School exclusions** – The Committee enquired about the number of Early Years children who had been excluded as outlined in the report. The Director commented that there were challenges in the county around exclusions and attendance, as well as increasing numbers of children EHE, although noted this had reduced and expected quarter three monitoring data to reflect this. Data was used to track exclusions, and work continued with schools to prevent exclusions and support children, although schools ultimately made these decisions. Exclusions for Early Years children was likely due to unmet SEND needs, and it was hoped that changes to the Ofsted Framework, which had a greater emphasis on inclusion, attendance and exclusions, would reduce children being excluded. The Director commented on the increase in EHE due to some parents feeling that their child's needs were not being met and that work was continuing with families to return children to mainstream education.
- **Self harm** – The Committee asked if the number of children reported as attending A&E due to self harm were children in care or from the wider community. The Director clarified that this was the wider community.
- **ESSCP scrutiny** – The Committee welcomed the involvement of young people in the scrutiny arrangements of the ESSCP and discussed the use of youth voice in the People Committee, noting examples of youth voice in other forums including the Corporate Parenting panel, although acknowledged that this would need to be managed to ensure young people felt comfortable. The Director commented that the young scrutineers had only recently been recruited but that there could be opportunities for them to engage with the Committee. The role of the partnership was to ensure that youth voice was central to shaping its views and work. The Lead Member for Education and ISEND commented on his positive experiences with engaging with young people through a variety of settings.

22.6 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

23. OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENT

23.1 The Director of Children's Services introduced the report which outlined the findings of the Ofsted Focused Inspection of the East Sussex Children's Services 23 -31 July 2025. The inspection focused on Children in need or subject to a protection plan. The report was overall positive, with the improvements made following the last ILACS in 2023 recognised, as was the robust support and services provided for vulnerable children and the Department's focus on a stable, skilled and valued workforce.

23.2 The Lead Member for Children and Families commented on the positive report and thanked staff for their excellent work in a challenging environment.

23.3 The Committee welcomed the positive findings in the report and thanked the Director as well as the wider team and RESOLVED to note the report.

24. WORK PROGRAMME

24.1 The Chair introduced the work programme report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme and noted that the Committee had reviewed this in detail at its recent away day.

Home to School Transport

24.2 John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative) provided an update on the work of the scoping board which met in October to consider a scrutiny review of Home to School Transport. The Board received a presentation on, and considered, service demand, budget pressures and cost avoidance strategies. The Board discussed legal constraints, procurement challenges and alternative transport models and considered where a scrutiny review could most add value.

24.3 The Board concluded that in light of the current statutory framework, and pending national SEND reforms, a broad review of Home to School Transport would be unfeasible. However, there was value in conducting a focused scrutiny review on Personal Transport Budgets (PTB) and Independent Travel Training (ITT) where there is potential for the Council to develop local practice, and therefore recommended that a scrutiny review was undertaken to focus on how the Council can increase uptake of Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training.

24.4 Councillor Belsey commented on the positive training Members had recently received on HTST.

24.5 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the Terms of Reference for the scrutiny review of Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport.

24.6 Councillor Cross requested that the potential decision by the Home Office to house asylum seekers at the Training Camp at Crowborough in relation to local safeguarding responsibilities and arrangements was included on the work programme.

24.7 The Director of ASCH assured the Committee any safeguarding concerns would be overseen by the Safeguarding Adults Board, and community cohesion related concerns would be overseen by Wealden Community Safety Partnership and commented that these would fall outside the remit of the People Scrutiny Committee, however this could be kept under review as more information was provided by the Home Office.

24.8 Councillors Belsey and Howell commented that this was currently still under review from the Home Office and the situation was not currently within the remit of the Committee.

24.9 Forward plan

24.10 The Committee reviewed the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions.

Work Programme

24.11 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme.

25. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION ASSESSMENT OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE

25.1 The Chair informed the Board that the meeting was no longer quorate and therefore the following items would be considered on a non-statutory basis and that the resolutions of the Committee for these items would be formally agreed at its next meeting.

25.2 The Director of ASCH introduced the report which outlined the recent CQC assessment of ASCH which had resulted in a rating of 'Good'. The report highlighted strong partnerships, an excellent work force, and that the Department knows itself and its residents well. The Director welcomed comments from the Committee on the report as well as ongoing scrutiny input through the CQC Reference Group, to ensure effective challenge of the Department's response to the CQC recommendations through its improvement plans, as well as preparatory work for future assessments.

25.3 The Committee welcomed the positive findings in the report and thanked the Department, as well as wider partners, who had contributed to the CQC assessment.

25.4 The Committee asked questions in the following areas:

- **Care Act Waiting lists** – The Committee asked about the approach to reduce waiting lists for Care Act assessments. The Director responded that although ESCC performed well nationally in terms of waiting lists, waits devalued the service and targeted work was underway to define waiting lists (noting various circumstances that could fall out of ESCC control), understand the issue further, and to develop a consistent approach. Data was being used to provide greater clarity for monitoring and to create heat maps to highlight age breakdowns of people on waiting lists. This approach, as well as proportionate assessments and a trust assessor approach to reduce duplication, had resulted in a reduction in waiting lists. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was being piloted to further assist the assessment process through case file recording, with the aim to free up practitioner time and further reduce waiting lists. Councillor Ungar requested that this was looked at further within the CQC Reference Group.
- **Use of technology in assessments** – The Committee discussed the use of AI and reviews conducted via telephone and asked if this allowed for professional curiosity into people's living conditions, and if this indicated staff shortages. The Director responded the Department endeavoured to conduct face to face Care Act assessments in all instances, however immediate care could be provided in response to a crisis or emergency following a telephone conversation. For assessment reviews, these should be proportionate and alternative methods sought, including clinics, video and telephone calls. The Director commented that it was still important to see people in their homes, but this could be through other agencies and highlighted the role of Integrated Community Teams in this. The use of AI was being piloted to support practitioners to improve response times to assessments and reviewing need.
- **Financial assessment** – The Committee asked for more information about the CQC finding that information around Financial Assessments was not consistently made clear to people and noted the challenges for some people in understanding this information and the need to consider likely difficult circumstances. The Director noted that information could be complex and agreed that repetition was needed when providing information to ensure people understood it as well as

offering follow up conversations. The Director noted that the CQC had fed back on the clarity of some of this information and informed the Committee that the Department worked with the Citizen's Panel and the People Bank to ensure communications were clear, whilst still detailing the necessary complex messages, but commented that this would remain under review.

- **Carers** – The Committee sought clarification on how the Committee would progress work on the Carer's Partnership Programme which had previously been identified as an area of interest by the Committee. The Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that this topic was on the work programme as a potential future topic for a review and could commence once the review into Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training had been completed, however a briefing could be arranged prior to this. The Director of ASCH reiterated that supporting carers was a priority for the Council, given their contribution to the county.

25.5 The Committee RESOLVED to consider the outcome of the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) Assessment of Adult Social Care in East Sussex and to monitor and review the development and implementation of departmental actions in response to the CQC report through the CQC Reference Group.

26. REVIEW OF ASCH SAVINGS PROPOSALS

26.1 The Director of ASCH introduced the report which outlined the progress of ASCH savings proposals implemented in 2025, including the impact of these savings on individuals, carers, staff, and associated property.

26.2 The Director commented that transitions for people and carers to alternative provision had been successful, with minimal disruption, although acknowledged some level of disruption was unavoidable.

26.3 Appendix B of the report detailed staffing changes from the savings proposals and the Director noted that across all savings, there had been five compulsory redundancies, with strong efforts made to redeploy staff where possible.

26.4 Appendix C of the report detailed current actual/estimated savings against original forecasted savings. The Director noted the change from the original proposal to close Linden Court day service for people with a Learning Disability and merge it with Beeching Park day service, to a revised proposal to retain the service at Linden Court which had reduced the savings forecast. There had also been slippage across other savings due to staffing processes and transition. However, all savings were due to be delivered by the next financial year.

26.5 The Committee asked questions in the following areas:

- **Staffing** – The Committee acknowledged the difficult time for staff during this process, noting that some had resigned before it was complete, and sought assurance that remaining staff in different roles were supported, both within their roles and in terms of wider wellbeing. The Director clarified that all staff were inducted into new roles with full training and support and there was a good wellbeing offer from the Council for all staff which staff and managers were aware of.
- **Housing-Related Floating Support** – The Committee discussed the impacts of reducing funding for Housing-Related Floating Support on district and borough councils and ASC staff - the report noted an increased workload with housing related support tasks. The Committee also asked if work had been done to understand potential impacts on a future unitary authority. The Director stated that while the service is valued, funding was reduced to prioritise statutory services, as districts and boroughs held primary responsibility. District and

borough councils agreed to match ESCC funding to help mitigate impacts, notably for homelessness prevention, but the exact effects on housing departments remained unclear amid ongoing sector challenges. Increased signposting to housing support had been considered for front-line staff when proposals were made and were in line with expectations. The Director commented that there had not yet been work on the impact of the saving on a potential unitary authority and noted the recent launch of the Government consultation on two proposals for local government reorganisation which would have very different implications for those services.

26.6 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting ended at 12.12 pm.

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)

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Report to:	People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	12 March 2026
By:	Director of Public Health
Title:	Healthy Ageing
Purpose:	To provide the Committee with a 12-month update in respect of the action plan agreed upon the publication of the original Scrutiny review of Healthy Ageing in Adult Social Care and Health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the progress made against the agreed actions at Appendix 1.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 In February 2025, Full Council approved the report of the Scrutiny Review Board on Healthy Ageing in Public Health. There were eight recommendations in the report and an accompanying action plan.
- 1.2 This report brings an update on steps taken in implementing the recommendations. Good progress has been made with all recommendations completed. There is some ongoing work with Human Resources and Communications to progress some items of Recommendation 5 (R5) and R6. More details can be found in Appendix 1.

2. Progressing Action

- 2.1 We have shared information and key learning from the scrutiny report on Healthy Ageing with stakeholders of the East Sussex Healthy Ageing Partnership Group (HAPG) (R8). This partnership has been meeting for just over a year and provides a good alliance to collaborate on action to address important healthy ageing issues. For example, at the most recent meeting, we considered the opportunities to encourage volunteering with older adults (R7). HAPG reports to the East Sussex Health Outcomes Improvement Oversight Board in the Integrated Care Board (ICB).
- 2.2 The learning from this review on the importance of encouraging active lifestyles, tackling ageism, and creating more positive narratives that help celebrate ageing has informed both the Terms of Reference of the new HAPG group and key workstreams including campaigning, intergenerational activities and falls prevention.
- 2.3 Great progress has been made since the last 6-month update with implementing several new projects. These include the 'Stay Strong, Stay Steady, Stay Independent' falls prevention campaign, developed in partnership with HAPG members. The campaign engaged over 300 older adults across five events in Hastings and Rother, where emergency admission rates from falls are highest (R1). The campaign raised awareness of strength and balance activities for older adults, a gap noted in the scrutiny review, and received over 10,000 unique web visits to the campaign page that shared details of strength and balance activities.
- 2.4 The care home and physical activity review has helped secure additional resource to pilot a care home activator programme that will aim to test out opportunities to

encourage care homes to actively support adults living in their care to move more, and be less sedentary, to help them age well (R2).

- 2.5 A new toolkit for encouraging intergenerational activities has been developed and launched. A new micro-grant is in development for launch in April, during Global Intergenerational Week, in partnership with Hastings Borough Council (HBC) and Rother District Council (RDC)'s Age Friendly Programmes to encourage new intergenerational activities (R4).
- 2.6 Public Health has continued to identify 'learner' opportunities to progress key actions in the scrutiny action plan to date. For example, our Foundation Year 2 doctors have helped with the care home review of physical activity, and graduate Public Health Practitioners have helped progress the Age Without Limits campaign, Falls Prevention Awareness campaign, and intergenerational activity plans.
- 2.7 Partnerships with Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council's Age Friendly Programmes are progressing well (R8), with new programme lead roles driving early changes. Rother District Council has committed to pledge to become an Age Friendly Employer, and Hastings Borough Council is also considering this. Both organisations will be implementing micro-grants programmes to encourage additional intergenerational activity. Their plans also aim to continue to find creative ways to celebrate and encourage a positive narrative on ageing, including provision of ageism awareness training (R6).

3. Future priorities and next steps

- 3.1 The work on healthy ageing will continue to support the ageing population in East Sussex to live well. Key priority areas for work moving forward include:
 - Intergenerational activity – Launching the micro-grants programme in Age Friendly Hastings and Rother programmes. Continuing to seek additional investment to seed fund new intergenerational activities across East Sussex.
 - Identifying additional funding opportunities to support ageism awareness training; ageing well ambassador programmes; and extending the scope of Age Friendly Communities and Healthy Ageing work across East Sussex over the longer term.
 - Continuing to improve our communications and narrative on ageing and older people within the Council, and with our partners through the HAPG.
 - Supporting ESCC to embed Age Friendly Employer principles in recruitment and retention policies and continue to support wider employers to sign up to the Age Friendly Employer Pledge.
 - Continue to work with Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council to develop their plans for being Age Friendly Communities and explore opportunities for wider East Sussex sign-up to be an Age Friendly Community.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Tackling ageism, celebrating ageing and encouraging the uptake of active lifestyles into older age are important healthy ageing wellbeing priorities to ensure our ageing population can thrive and live a good and fulfilling life into older age. This will also contribute to reducing the need for welfare, health and social services.
- 4.2 The recommendations from the People Committee Scrutiny Review have been embedded within the ongoing mainstream work of the department and the HAPG, and we will continue to progress this within Healthy Ageing workstreams.

4.3 A full update of the progress made on the Review recommendations are outlined in the Action Plan at Appendix 1.

Darrell Gale

Director of Public Health

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Appendix 1: Healthy Ageing Action Plan

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PEOPLE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF HEALTHY AGEING – Action Plan 12 Month Review				
SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION	DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN	Update Notes	TIMESCALE	RAG (red, amber, green rating)
R1. The Department should use insights from this Review to strengthen content and promotion of the campaign, 'Getting East Sussex Moving'; sharing messaging and imagery that particularly encourage and promote opportunities for older people to be active and addresses known barriers to participation.	<p>The Department introduced the Getting East Sussex Moving Campaign Toolkit in 2023. The campaign aims to celebrate the places we can be active across the county #GettingEastSussexMoving. It is linked to Active Sussex's strategy 'Getting Sussex Moving' To strengthen the campaign using insights from this review, we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Invite healthy ageing partners into the campaign steering group to ensure messaging is optimised and linked to other projects or activities (e.g. Stronger for Life funded activities). 2) Tailor the campaign themes for 2024/25 to address issues within 	<p>The Getting East Sussex Moving campaign toolkit was shared monthly from August 2023 until August 2025. It was shared with physical activity partners across the county, and our local active partnerships disseminate the toolkit to their members which include the funded activity providers.</p> <p>Between October 2024 and August 2025, the campaign has featured themes that link to the healthy ageing agenda, such as being active through walking, being active with disabilities, cancer, long term conditions and being active for mental health. A project plan for the next phase of Getting East Sussex Moving is being developed, along with an updated steering group structure to include a healthy ageing subgroup. The next phase of the campaign will run for 12 months, start date TBC but likely to be between April-June 2026.</p> <p>Each month's toolkit included messaging and imagery which directly targets and communicates to the ageing population in the county, and signposts them towards local sessions and knowledge information for support, on our Getting East Sussex Moving webpage – which has also undergone a redesign to</p>	October 2024 to August 2025	Green

		<p>ageing, for example messaging for people with a long-term condition, people that have had a fall etc.</p> <p>3) Tailor the campaign messaging to address known physical activity barriers for this population and to rebut social norms (e.g. tendency for older people to feel a need to 'slow down' or undertake less activity) as well as to impart knowledge (e.g. reasons for doing strength and balance exercise).</p> <p>4) Seek to build capacity to evaluate the campaign through exploring student placement opportunities.</p>	<p>improve its usability. A key theme in the updated campaign will continue to be older adults.</p> <p>The campaign has been evaluated in-house, and the final report circulated in January 2026, with recommendations to be implemented in the next iteration of the campaign.</p> <p>The campaign will continue to be evaluated in-house.</p> <p>Stay Strong, Stay Steady, Stay Independent falls prevention campaign – Public Health in partnership with 'Healthy Ageing Partnership Group' members developed and launched a new falls prevention campaign in the autumn for Falls Prevention Awareness week and the Full of Life festival. It aimed to raise awareness of the importance of strength and balance activity to maintain independence as people age and reduce the risk of falls. It targeted areas in Hastings and Bexhill who have the highest rates of emergency admissions for falls age 65+. There were over 300 interventions across 5 community events, providing a pair of non-slip slippers and brief advice to encourage strength and balance activities and other tips to prevent falls. The campaign had good social media engagement and there were over 10,000 unique visits to the dedicated "Stay Strong, Stay Steady, Stay Independent" webpage, that provided information on local classes and home exercises for those unable to attend classes.</p>	<p>September 2024 to August 2025</p> <p>September 2024 to August 2025</p> <p>By August 2025</p>	
R2.	The Department should continue to work with Active Sussex to maximise	There is a commitment from the Council and Active Sussex to continue to work collaboratively and co-design interventions that support the healthy ageing	Active Sussex officer is seconded into ASCH Strategic Development team one day a week to Dec 2025. Progress includes supporting the development of the Adult Social Care Prevention Strategy , that highlights the importance of physical	By December 2025	Green

	<p>opportunities to embed physical activity into Adult Social Care processes and pathways, to include but not limited to:</p> <p>a) Upskilling social care staff to confidently raise the issue of physical activity and signpost to physical activity opportunities; and</p> <p>b) Establishing sustainable Stronger for Life strength and balance sessions across clinical, community and care settings in East Sussex, particularly focusing on areas where falls are more prevalent.</p>	<p>agenda up to and beyond the end of the current agreement.</p> <p>To support this recommendation, the ongoing work will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Setting out explicitly in the East Sussex Adult Social Care Prevention Strategy, the need for all Departmental services to ensure that its is a basic right for those engaging with services to have the opportunity to move or exercise in a way that works for them, making this the norm. 2) Working with colleagues across the Council to embed movement and activity as an essential offer within agreements with providers. 3) Explore implementation of mandatory training for key job roles to support the workforce to speak more confidently about the importance of movement and activity and how residents can 	<p>wellbeing and has enabled Active Sussex working with partners to achieve the following -</p> <p>Stronger for Life Project and Strength and Balance activity - We have invested £60,000 into 24 local Stronger for Life projects to support improved strength and balance activity, across targeted areas of East Sussex where there are identified gaps in strength and balance exercise programs. The Stronger for Life programme has demonstrated clear positive outcomes. Participants showed measurable improvements in strength, balance, mobility, and overall physical function, alongside increased confidence, mental wellbeing, and independence. These interventions contributed to a reduced risk of falls, hospital admissions, and longer-term care needs, while also strengthening community connections and reducing social isolation (full report due in 2026).</p> <p>Active Sussex are a member of the new Healthy Ageing Partnership Group (led by ESCC public health) and actively contribute, such as through the new East Sussex Community Falls Awareness Campaign that ran in the autumn and included signposting to existing Stronger for Life sessions.</p> <p>Workforce Capacity Building: To build long-term capacity, staff across Adult Social Care and Health services have been offered the "Helping People Become More Active" workshop as part of the Active Medicine Programme. A 'train-the-trainer' model is being used so the learning can be delivered widely and sustainably. 60–80 care staff across Sussex have taken part in these workshops to date.</p> <p>Care Home Activity Review and next steps: In response to concerns that some care homes may not be offering their residents opportunities to be active since the pandemic, we engaged care homes to understand physical activity provision</p>		
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		<p>access local support. to achieve this.</p> <p>4) Utilise an opportunity through the Active Medicine Programme for staff to be trained and then deliver the training for colleagues and services within the Department.</p> <p>5) Use local insight to target Stronger for Life activities to those most at risk of falling (due to inactivity and lack of strength training, and deconditioning).</p> <p>6) Work collaboratively with delivery partners to provide and evaluate the Stronger for Life activities.</p>	<p>and attitudes in care homes. Actions from this have been included in the E Sussex Care Home Actions plan, to help encourage care homes to offer physical activity. This piece of work has led to investment from ASCH and Sport England to deliver the 'Care Home Activator' movement and activity programme in pilot care homes in Bexhill, Eastbourne and Hastings where falls data show greatest need. This will take place in 2026.</p> <p>Align and Enhancing Systemwide Resources: Supporting ongoing initiatives including the Stroke Reconditioning Project Phase one: This was an innovative approach of bringing health instructors into the hospital setting at the Bexhill Irvine Unit for 2 sessions per week over 26 weeks. Partnerships have been established with providers in Wealden, Rother, Hastings, Eastbourne, and Lewes, ensuring a smooth transition into community-based sessions as part of the ongoing recovery. A second phase provided a further 6 months programme in the Bexhill Irvine Unit and increased access by live screening into additional units and acute wards across East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and Universities Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust. The next phase is moving towards more face-to-face delivery at the acute wards. Stronger for Life in Hospital (as the project is now known) recently won the President's Award at the Community Hospitals Association Innovation & Best Practice Awards. It received outstanding feedback for improving recovery, independence, and wellbeing, while setting a strong example of innovation and partnership in tackling hospital deconditioning.</p>		
R3.	Continue to support the establishment and the embedding of Active	The Active Partnership model aims to increase access and participation in physical activity, and to improve the health of			Green

	<p>Partnerships across all districts and boroughs in East Sussex, including through:</p> <p>a) Ensuring that the physical activity workforce is able to offer activities that support a range of abilities and health conditions; and</p> <p>b) Consulting older people on the types of activity that they wish to take part in.</p>	<p>people living and working in the county. They have been commissioned for all districts and boroughs in the county. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active Rother - Active Hastings - Active Wealden - Active Eastbourne and Lewes (partnership due to launch in October 2024) <p>To support this recommendation we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Establish an Active Partnership for Eastbourne and Lewes. 2) Consult with older people in East Sussex and collect their views (including barriers and enablers) on physical activity through the East Sussex Healthy Weight Plan Community Engagement project. 3) Ensure that insights from the East Sussex Healthy Weight Plan Community Engagement are available at district and borough level and 	<p>1) An active partnership has been established for the Eastbourne and Lewes area and has conducted regular quarterly meetings with over 50 physical activity partners attending regularly. The partnership has launched small grants funding, and to date has funded at least two projects specifically for older adults – pickleball in the community and seniors’ strength and balance classes. Partnership agreement has been extended until March 2027.</p> <p>2&3) The East Sussex Healthy Weight Partnership has concluded insights on the plan, which collected residents views on healthy weight. Older age was recognised by residents as a barrier for physical activity. The report has generated a number of recommendations to support residents to be more active, which was published in July and the Healthy Weight partnership will work to implement these recommendations. The recommendations are being considered in the update of the healthy weight plan for 2027.</p>	<p>Initiated and ongoing</p> <p>Initiated, by March 2025</p> <p>By May 2025</p>	
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		<p>shared with the active partnerships to inform future planning.</p> <p>4) Share learning about engaging and working with older people at the bi-monthly Active Partnerships networking meeting, and to host a meeting focussed on the topic of healthy ageing.</p> <p>5) Ensure the Active Partnerships continue to support the physical activity workforce to access development opportunities allowing them to build knowledge and confidence in working with older people.</p>	<p>4) The active partnerships continue to meet regularly, and met most recently in January 2026, to consider what further work could be done to support older adults across the county. Work continues with the Active Partnerships to support falls prevention through provision of physical activity and strength and balance opportunities, e.g. in Stronger for Life and through considering opportunities to provide intergenerational activities. The group is supporting the next iteration of the Getting East Sussex Moving toolkit, of which older adults will be a focus and a new sub-group created.</p> <p>5) A physical activity workforce survey and engagement exercise was conducted between October and December 2025, the results are being used to inform the development and delivery of a county-wide workforce development programme, to support the workforce to access CPD to improve and increase physical activity delivery. A meeting took place between all East Sussex active partnerships, Active Sussex and public health in February 2026, where a tailored initial pilot workforce offer has been devised for May to September 2026. 140 free training places will be on offer for the physical activity workforce during this period across three different courses (Raising Money For Your Club, Engaging Your Community, Helping People to Become More Active). A further offer beyond September will be devised based on evaluation of this initial pilot.</p>	<p>By June 2025</p> <p>Initiated and ongoing.</p>	
R4.	The Department should explore opportunities, including with partners, for intergenerational activities to create	ASC&H has begun a review to understand the evidence on intergenerational activities, and initial mapping has identified a small number of intergenerational projects in East Sussex. These are mainly	Review of intergenerational (IG) activity in East Sussex - has been completed, highlighting the many positive wellbeing benefits for older and younger generations. A snapshot of good activities and good practice were identified in E Sussex, including an amazing IG charity Young@Heart in Heathfield.	Ongoing	Green

	social connections, and tackle ageism.	<p>led by early years organisations and schools.</p> <p>The learning from this will be shared with the East Sussex Healthy Ageing Partnership Group (HAPG), to discuss and explore opportunities to encourage intergenerational activities across the health and care system</p>	<p>The learning informed future recommendations and priorities to help encourage further IG activity provision in East Sussex, including;</p> <p>1- Develop and launch an IG toolkit – In partnership with local organisations, such as Young@Heart, with experience of providing IG activities to help people set up new intergenerational activities. The toolkit packed full of local case studies and tips, launched in Jan 2026 with 3 webinars to promote use of the toolkit and local case studies. And will continue to be promoted through community, education and ASC networks and the ESCC website</p> <p>2- Worked in partnership to encourage new IG activities - with members of the HAPG, e.g. food and cookery activities with our Food Partnerships, and activity opportunities with our Active Partnerships. See successful new IG activities launched with Active Hastings and Veterans Growth in Staplecross.</p> <p>3 – Identified a small resource to develop a micro-grants programme with Age Friendly Hastings and Age Friendly Rother, to seed fund and encourage trialling new IG activities.</p> <p>We will continue to explore opportunities to encourage further intergenerational activity using the toolkit and seek further funding sources and opportunities to encourage IG activities across East Sussex.</p> <p>Learning from the scrutiny review has been shared with the HAPG, and some members are actively supporting the development of the new priorities above.</p>	By April 2025	
R5.	The Department should work to support people in the workplace as they age, including by:	a) Work is ongoing to explore the feasibility of the Council signing up to the Age Friendly Employer Pledge (AFE), to demonstrate commitment, as a large anchor institution, to	a) ESCC interest to sign up to the AFE pledge - A proposal, for the council to join the AFE pledge, was taken to the Human Resources Management Board (HRMB) in 2024. HRMB agreed to review their approach to addressing all protected characteristics, to inform their decision. HRMB are in principle, in support of ESCC developing their own approach, rather than	2024 and ongoing	Amber

	<p>a) Progressing work with HR to explore the principles within the Age Friendly Employment Pledge to understand how these apply to existing ESCC policies; and</p> <p>b) Promoting the benefits of and supporting local employers to become Age Friendly Employers through its Wellbeing at Work Programme.</p>	<p>supporting adults to age well in work. This will include a review of current work on all protected characteristics, not just age, before considering whether to join the AFE pledge.</p> <p>A review of progress in embedding age friendly principles across existing policies that affect recruitment, retention and personal development of employees as they age.</p> <p>b) Information about Age Friendly Employers (AFE) has been promoted in the monthly newsletter and at a champions network meeting.</p> <p>The Council will consider other opportunities to encourage AFE. This will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Updating the wellbeing at work resource pack, to promote the AFE pledge as a good way to adopt age positive approaches in their workplace. This will support organisations working towards the 	<p>signing up to the many different ones available. They have commissioned a piece of work to look at all protected characteristics and the various charters, standards, pledges etc that are available or have been proposed to consider similarities and differences in order to inform the next step/s. The findings from this will then be presented to CMT for decision.</p> <p>If this approach is agreed, further work will take place to embed Age Friendly principles across polices to support the recruitment and retention and personal development of workers aged 50+, to reduce risk of age discrimination.</p> <p>b) Encouraging employers in E Sussex to sign up to AFE - Work continues to encourage employers to sign up to the AFE pledge, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellbeing@work resource pack - details of the AFE pledge have been added to the Wellbeing@Work resource pack, to encourage employers to adopt best practice. - Case studies – Case studies from employers who have signed up to the AFE pledge have been captured and will continue to be used to promote the pledge to other employers. - Face to face promotions with employers - at the annual Wellbeing@Work awards event took place in March 2025. Employers shared low awareness of the pledge and discussions on ageism in the workplace. Many showed interest in the pledge and taking more action on improving recruitment and retention of workers aged 50+. - AFE webinar – was offered to employers in the Wellbeing@work network and HAPG on 17th June, as part of plans to celebrate ageing and tackle ageism for the ‘Age Without Limits Campaign Action Day’. A number of employers who attended the event shared they intended to sign up to the pledge following the webinar. 	<p>By Jan 2026</p> <p>Nov 2024</p>	
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		<p>optional criteria of implementing approaches to support healthy ageing at work.</p> <p>2) Identifying East Sussex employer(s) who have signed up to the AFE pledge, to explore their interest to share a case study of their experience of being an age friendly employer. This will help other employers understanding of the pledge, which may encourage them to consider pledging to AFE.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rother District Council have recently committed to sign up to the AFE pledge, as part of their developing plans for Age Friendly Rother, with timelines and next steps tba. Hastings Borough Council are also considering their commitment to sign up to AFE. Wealden DC are already signed up. 	Nov 24 to April 25	
R6.	<p>The Department should seek to work with Departments across the Council to influence a more positive narrative of ageing in East Sussex including:</p> <p>a) By promoting age friendly imagery and language that</p>	<p>a & b) The Council will aim to identify and share examples of good practice on the use of age positive images and language and explore opportunities to embed good practice across the Council. This will include exploring the feasibility of implementing a policy or guide for the recommended use of age positive language and images.</p>	<p>Comms within the council –Age Friendly Communications within ESCC was first raised with the councils ‘East Sussex Communications and Involvement Steering Group’ on 17 July 2025. Then a further meeting was held with ESCC Comms and ESCC Equalities team on 5th Feb 2026, where we have agreed to work together to consider and implement the most effective approach to embed the principles of age friendly language and communication in our work and through our networks, and promote a positive narrative on ageing, e.g. we are considering developing a new campaign to celebrate ageing to run alongside the annual celebration of Older Peoples day in Sept, with the Full of Life festival.</p> <p>Further work on this will be developed over the coming months.</p>	November 24 to April 25	Amber

	<p>engage people at different life stages and ensures people of all ages are represented when promoting a range of services;</p> <p>b) That the benefits of an ageing population, including contributions to caring and volunteering, are included in communications about East Sussex; and</p> <p>c) Supporting the development of further training on positive ageing to staff and Members.</p>	<p>The learning will be shared with the Healthy Ageing Partnership Group, to consider how these principles could be used across wider partnership organisations.</p> <p>c) The Department will seek to identify:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) examples of good practice training to help raise awareness of ageism, and encourage more age positive practice 2) opportunities both within the Council, and with partners through the Healthy Ageing Partnership Group, to implement future training opportunities. 	<p>Age Without Limits Campaign - Learning from the scrutiny review has been shared with partners of the HAPG, and the initial priority agreed to help tackle ageism and celebrate ageing, was to promote the Age Without Limits Action Day on 11 June 2025.</p> <p>A small sub-group of partners from the HAPG representing the Age Friendly Community areas of Hastings & Rother have worked to develop and implement events and comms for the Action Day. Events planned and delivered included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Celebrate ageing & tackle ageism conversation with community members across Hastings & Rother 10 June 2025 - Celebrate ageing and tackle ageism event with older adults at the Broomgrove Oasis Summer retreat, Hastings on 11 June 2025 - Active Hastings hosted an intergenerational fitness session for over 50's together with children from the local nursery. And have subsequently hosted a further xmas IG activity following the success of the initial June event. - Age Friendly Employer pledge webinar for employers in the wellbeing@work and HAPG networks on 17 June 2025 - Comms including Your East Sussex article, media release supported by DPH & local IG charity Young@Heart and social media have been developed and shared through HAPG and networks to raise awareness of ageism and events to celebrate the Age Without Limits Action day. <p>-</p> <p>Ageism Awareness training – Work is ongoing to raise awareness of ageism, to encourage action to tackle age discrimination and encourage a more positive narrative on ageing. Ageism awareness training is offered to ASC staff quarterly, with 39 staff trained to date.</p>	<p>May – Sept 2025</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	
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			<p>HVA, a HAPG member, provide an Ageism awareness training session for community members in Hastings in Sept 2025. Age Friendly Communities programmes in Hastings & Rother plan to offer Ageism awareness training within HBC and RDC and their communities. Public Health will continue to explore additional resource opportunities to commission further ageism awareness training across the county.</p> <p>Seahaven FM radio show - Steve Broome in ASC took part in a Health Talk show on Seahaven FM in early Feb to discuss healthy ageing, promote ASC's free 'Life Transitions Service' and provide advice on how listeners can meet life's challenges and opportunities and shape their own future. This included awareness of how individuals might sometimes limit their own beliefs and actions through internalised ageism.</p>		
R 7	<p>The Department should promote flexible volunteer opportunities that address barriers to volunteering and link people to opportunities based on their interests, ability and skills.</p>	<p>Work is underway with public and strategic VCSE sector partners to develop support for volunteer involving organisations that will enable them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand the barriers to volunteering - Learn how to mitigate against these barriers through designing and developing flexible volunteering opportunities. - Have access to communication channels that promote flexible volunteering 	<p>Communications and Campaign supporting and promoting Volunteering</p> <p>During the last 12 months the ESCC Partnerships Team worked with ESCC Corporate Communications, Tribe and partners to design and deliver several campaigns promoting and celebrating volunteering to the general population, and specific cohorts.</p> <p>Campaigns were also developed to coincide with specific themes (awareness weeks):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteer's Week 2025 - Refugee Week - Carers Week <p>Each campaign was designed to include opportunities that appeal to the wider population young people, people living with disabilities, working age adults, and older people.</p> <p>The most recent campaign targeting Young People from the age of 11-25, featured stories from young volunteers at ESCC Youth</p>	<p>This activity is ongoing through VCSE Infrastructure Support, and Tribe contracts, and will be included in new programmes that will come on line in 2025/26.</p>	Green

		<p>opportunities to the residents of East Sussex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have access to platforms to list volunteering opportunities, recruit volunteers, and manage volunteers. <p>This will include ensuring that this activity is applied to volunteering opportunities for young people, people living with disabilities, working age adults, and older people.</p> <p>The Council and partners will work to ensure the information and learning is shared widely with external partners, both strategic and hyper-local partners.</p> <p>Work will be undertaken across the Council to ensure we collectively understand the barriers, mitigations and tools that can be used to address the barriers to volunteering.</p>	<p>Hubs and links to live appropriate volunteer opportunities on Tribe. This campaign helped to further trial the use of Snapchat and Tiktok alongside Instagram, Viva Engage and a Your East Sussex article.</p> <p>Initial results for this campaign show that it reached 200,000 people and 1,500 people 11-17 year olds clicked through to Tribe.</p> <p>Initial feedback indicates that 3 volunteer applications were received by Youth Hubs during this weeklong campaign, we are still collecting feedback from this campaign.</p> <p>The assets for these campaigns were based on live volunteering roles, real stories and thank you images from our local partners, Becky Shaw, ESCC staff and councillors.</p> <p>Following each campaign we have undertaken follow up conversations with the organisations listing opportunities on Tribe that were promoted, the feedback to date has showed that 37% of the organisations listed on Tribe, following a campaign successfully recruited ne volunteers, this includes ESCC Libraries, The Association of Carers, Wealden Volunteering, Family Hubs and Umbrella Sussex.</p> <p>Campaigns have contributed to very strong growth in the monthly views of volunteering opportunities and activities listed on the Tribe platform.</p> <p>December 2024 Tribe recorded ~2,500 views, in December 2025 there were 20,000 monthly views. Over the last twelve months we have seen views reach 35,000 in a campaign.</p> <p>The Partnership Team, Tribe and Corporate Communications are in the process of designing a new programme of campaigns</p>		
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			<p>that will involve partners working on specific themes/service areas.</p> <p>We are in the early stages of working with the East Sussex Mental Health Action Group to develop assets and resources to promote volunteering via their wide network of public and VCSE sector partners.</p>		
R 8	<p>The Department should continue to strengthen partnership work to enable further development of healthy ageing workstreams across East Sussex by:</p> <p>a) Establishing a new multi-agency Healthy Ageing Partnership Group and sharing learning from this Review to inform future system priorities;</p> <p>b) Working with district and borough Councils to pilot Age Friendly</p>	<p>a) It has been agreed with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) Health Outcomes Improvement Oversight Board (HOIOB), to establish a new 'Healthy Ageing Partnership Group' subgroup. This will bring together stakeholders across the health and care system to develop a strategic vision for healthy ageing and improve joint working and outcomes for healthy ageing related workstreams.</p> <p>The learning from this review will be shared with the new group, to help inform priorities for the group. In particular we will encourage a focus on action to support adults to remain active into older age, tackling ageism and encouraging a more positive narrative on ageing.</p>	<p>Healthy Ageing Partnership Group (HAPG) – this new group was established and met for the first time in Nov 2024 and continue to meet bi-monthly. The partnership includes a broad membership across the health and care system. Learning from the scrutiny review has been shared with the HAPG and has informed the Terms of Reference, function and priorities for the group. Key initial priorities include preventing falls, due to the high emergency admissions from falls in E Sussex (Recs 1-3), being a lead voice for tackling ageism (Recs 4-6), supporting the implementation of Age Friendly Communities (R8) and improving collaboration and best use of resources for a range of important workstreams relating to ageing, e.g. winter planning (R8).</p> <p>HAPG members have been active in supporting some of the key projects implemented above such as Stay Strong, Steady & Independent Falls campaign, Age Without Limits ageism awareness campaign and intergenerational work.</p> <p>Age Friendly Communities – Partnerships with Hastings Borough Council (HBC) and Rother District Council (RDC) have successfully been agreed to develop and implement plans for being Age Friendly Communities. 3 year partnership agreements are in place to provide £50k per annum with each LA, to enable them to build part-time officer capacity to lead plans for Age Friendly Communities. This will lead up to the period the new unitary for East Sussex should be commencing. Both RDC and HBC have successfully recruited a new lead officer to develop</p>	October 2024 - ongoing	Green

	<p>Communities in East Sussex to support people to age well; and</p> <p>c) Exploring the use of ageing well ambassador programmes.</p>	<p>b&c) The Council will engage with district and borough local authorities to explore potential to pilot Age Friendly Communities in their areas. This will include exploring opportunities to introduce ageing well ambassador programmes.</p>	<p>and implement their plans for being Age Friendly Communities. Both organisations are already active members of the HAPG and contribute to workstreams associated with the scrutiny review, as described above.</p> <p>They have established a new joint steering group for Age Friendly Hastings and Rother, with broad membership including elected member leads for older people and ageing well in each LA.</p> <p>Both are currently developing baseline assessments to understand the needs of older adults in their area, that will help inform priorities and actions for their plans moving forward. As above, RDC have also committed to be an Age Friendly Employer', and HBC are also actively considering this with their HR dept.</p> <p>East Sussex Age Friendly Public Health lead attended the LGA's webinar <i>Responding to an ageing population: What makes an age-friendly community?</i> on behalf of ESCC on 20 Nov 2025. Learning from the Age Friendly Programmes in Hastings & Rother and Centre for Ageing Better Age Friendly Programmes, will continue to inform wider developments for East Sussex, e.g. considering the value and commitment for ESCC and East Sussex taking action to pledge to be an Age Friendly Community.</p> <p>Ageing Well Ambassadors – We aim to explore opportunities to develop Ageing Well Ambassador as part of the Age Friendly Communities Programmes over the next two years. This will include identifying funding streams to develop and manage the volunteer programme.</p>	<p>October 2024 onwards</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	
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Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 12 March 2026

By: Deputy Chief Executive

Title: People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Purpose: To review and discuss the People Scrutiny Committee's future work programme

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) review the current work programme at Appendix 1 and identify any key areas that should be highlighted for consideration by the incoming People Scrutiny Committee to inform its early work programming and RPPR engagement;
 - 2) review the suggested approach to ongoing work and areas of focus for the Committee;
 - 3) review the Committee's input to the RPPR process and identify any additional information which may be required to inform future scrutiny engagement;
 - 4) review upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's Forward Plan as set out at Appendix 3 to identify any issues that may require more detailed scrutiny; and
 - 5) identify any priority topics it would be helpful to incorporate within the induction and training programme for new members and the new committee.
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1 Background

1.1 The work programme is an important tool in ensuring a Committee led approach and that the Committee's time is used scrutinising topics that the Committee considers are of importance.

1.2 In the context of the forthcoming election, Members are recommended to consider which areas of work can now be concluded, and which areas should be highlighted for early consideration by the incoming committee from May 2026 onwards.

1.3 In setting and reviewing the work programme, Members should also consider the Committee's input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process and identify any information which may be needed for the incoming committee to provide effective challenge on key issues and areas of work impacting on the Council's future planning.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The March meeting provides a final opportunity for this committee to consider its current work programme, including the status of reviews, reference group work and RPPR engagement, and to identify any suggested areas of focus that may be helpful for an incoming committee to consider as part of its early work programming. Current and planned work of the Committee is outlined below.

Scrutiny Reviews

Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport

2.2 The review of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport has concluded and the report of the Review Board is included on this meeting agenda. In light of the timing of the election, the incoming committee will have the opportunity to consider the report and recommendations ahead of reporting to Cabinet and Council.

Reference Groups

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assessment

2.3 The Group last met on 26 January to consider progress against the 2025 CQC findings as well as next steps in the CQC assessment cycle. The Group welcomed progress to date and discussed ongoing work with carers as well as programmes of work focused on prevention and neighbourhood health.

2.4 It is proposed that a further meeting be arranged following the election for the incoming committee to receive an overview of the CQC framework and to consider the ASCH updated self-assessment.

Devolution and LGR

2.5 The Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Reference Group, made up of Members of both Place and People Scrutiny Committees, last met on 17 February 2026. The Reference Group reviewed and provided comments for consideration to the Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development on his response to the Government's request for views regarding any Structural Change Order required for Local Government Reorganisation. The Reference Group also considered and commented on the latest position on the imminent establishment of the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority. The Reference Group agreed that it would not meet again prior to local elections in May 2026, and that future scrutiny engagement on these issues should be reviewed following the Government's decision on LGR and the local elections.

Carbon Reduction Target

2.6 Following a recommendation from Cabinet in December 2025 that scrutiny considers the target for the carbon emissions arising from County Council operations measure within the Council Plan, Place and People Scrutiny Committees confirmed that they would undertake this work through a joint Reference Group. The Group will review evidence and consider whether the current carbon reduction target remains realistic and achievable within existing resources. Meetings will take place in March and April 2026 with a view to benefiting from the knowledge and experience of existing members prior to consideration by the incoming scrutiny committees.

Children's Services Reforms

2.7 The Children's Services Reforms Reference Group provides ongoing scrutiny of national reforms relating to Children's Services and the impact of these on ESCC. The Group is next due to meet in April 2026 to consider progress on the Family First Programme. In light of the timing of the local elections, the Committee may wish to revise this approach. However, given the large number of reforms in Children's services, it is proposed to retain this on the work programme to enable the incoming committee to continue scrutiny in this area.

Health and Social Care Integration Programme (HASCIP)

2.8 The Group last met on 6 October 2025 to consider quarterly progress on the Shared Delivery Plan. The Group also received an update on ongoing reforms to Integrated Care Boards and the wider NHS, discussing potential impacts for East Sussex. This long-term Reference Group has been aligned to key milestones in the East Sussex Health and Social Care Integration Programme to enable ongoing scrutiny. Given the significant ongoing work on integration, it is proposed to retain this on the work programme to enable the incoming committee to consider its approach.

Scrutiny engagement in RPPR planning

2.9 This committee has provided key input into the RPPR process, both through consideration of specific RPPR reports and through more detailed scrutiny of specific issues through the wider work programme.

2.10 At the **November** meeting the Committee discussed the latest update to Cabinet on planning for 2026/27, including the latest financial position and national policy reforms.

2.11 The Committee's **RPPR Board** met on 11 December 2025 to consider the draft 2026/27 Portfolio Plans and the latest financial position. The Board:

- considered the emerging financial outlook based on Government announcements during the autumn;
- considered the draft Portfolio Plans and how priorities were reflected against the proposed key areas of budget spend for the coming year; and
- discussed savings proposals for service areas within the committee's remit contained in the December report to Cabinet.

2.12 Appendix 2 summarises the comments and recommendations made by the People Scrutiny Committee RPPR Board to Cabinet.

2.13 Members will be very familiar with the Council's budget setting process, having scrutinised and collectively set a number of budgets over the last 5 year electoral term. This accumulated knowledge forms an important basis for the Committee's contribution to the RPPR process and its ability to provide constructive challenge.

2.14 As Members will know, one element of the annual budget development process is identifying potential areas of search for savings, efficiencies, or income generation. At the present time, no further areas of search have been identified beyond those already presented to Members through the RPPR process and previous Cabinet reports. This reflects both the significant work undertaken in recent years to find efficiencies and the limited remaining scope for further reductions.

2.15 Members may wish to reflect on any learning from the 2025/26 RPPR cycle that would assist a new committee in engaging effectively with the RPPR process in 2026/27 and beyond.

2.16 The committee is invited at this meeting to identify any additional information which may be required to inform future scrutiny engagement, and:

- identify any further areas for potential savings, efficiencies, or income generation which should be considered as part of the future RPPR process;
- consider any issues arising from recent RPPR discussions that should be recommended to include in the future work programme; and
- review the Committee's input to the RPPR process and consider any improvements to the process from a scrutiny perspective.

2.17 Scrutiny's input to planning, through RPPR, for 2027/28 will begin at the **July** meeting with consideration of relevant parts of the quarter 4 2025/26 (end of year) monitoring report and the 2026 State of the County report.

Briefings and training

2.18 Members attended a briefing delivered by Adult Social Care and Health on the Carer's Partnership Plan on 3 March 2026. The presentation covered the context of carers in East Sussex and outlined the objectives, themes and progress of the Carer's Partnership Plan.

2.19 The incoming committee will receive induction and Member development support following the elections. Members are invited to identify any priority topics it would be helpful to incorporate within the programme.

Forward Plan

2.20 A copy of the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions for the period 1 March to 30 June 2026 is included at **Appendix 3**. The Committee is requested to review the forthcoming items on the Forward Plan to identify any issues within the remit of this committee that may require more detailed scrutiny. The Forward Plan is revised and published on a monthly basis and committee members should regularly review the Forward Plan.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 An important part of managing the work of the People Scrutiny Committee, including its input into the RPPR process, is regularly reviewing the future work programme. This involves the Committee assessing its priorities, ensuring reviews are completed in a timely fashion, and identifying new areas for scrutiny.

3.2 This report provides the Committee with an opportunity to review the current work programme at the end of the 2025/26 municipal year, to note progress made and any ongoing activity, and to identify any matters that it would be helpful to draw to the attention of the incoming People Scrutiny Committee following the May 2026 elections, including in relation to early work programming and engagement in the RPPR process.

PHILIP BAKER
Deputy Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

Tel. No. 07561267461

Email: rachel.sweeney@eastsussex.gov.uk

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People Scrutiny Committee - Work Programme

Current Scrutiny Reviews		
Title of Review	Detail	Proposed Completion Date
Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport	<p>Following previous discussions on pressures in Home to School Transport, the People Scrutiny Committee undertook an initial scoping exercise in May 2025 to better understand the issues and existing work underway. The Scoping Board concluded that a review into some specific cost avoidance measures could add value and agreed to consider this further in the autumn once additional information was available.</p> <p>The Scoping Board met again on 29 October 2025 and considered the growing pressures on the Home to School Transport system, driven by rising demand and policy uncertainty, particularly around SEND reforms.</p> <p>The Board concluded that in light of the current statutory framework the Council is required to work within, and pending national SEND reforms, a broad review of Home to School Transport would be unfeasible, however there was value in conducting a focused scrutiny review on Personal Transport Budgets (PTB) and Independent Travel Training (ITT) where there is potential for the Council to develop local practice. The Board agreed that the scrutiny review should explore what the Council could do to increase the uptake of PTBs and ITT.</p> <p>Membership of Review Board: Cllrs Belsey, Howell and Webb and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative).</p>	To report to March 2026 Committee
Initial Scoping Reviews		
Subject area for initial scoping	Detail	Proposed Dates
Suggested Potential Future Scrutiny Review Topics		
Suggested Topic	Detail	

Children's Mental Health Support	At its 2025 away day the Committee discussed increasing demand for Children's services due to parental and children's mental health needs and agreed to include children's mental health support, including its role in school attendance, to its work programme as a potential topic for a scrutiny review.	
Carers Partnership Plan	<p>At its 2024 away day the Committee agreed to recommend that a report on the progress of the Carers Partnership Plan be brought to the Committee and that it may wish to consider this topic for a future scrutiny review.</p> <p>The Committee discussed this again at its 2025 awayday, noting findings in the recent CQC assessment report that the plan had not been published at the time of writing, and agreed that although the Carers Partnership Plan had now been published, there was a role for scrutiny in monitoring the implementation of this.</p>	
Scrutiny Reference Groups		
Reference Group Title	Subject area	Meeting Dates
Corporate carbon reduction target	<p>The Committee has agreed to establish a Reference Group (joint with Place Committee) to consider the corporate carbon reduction target and what it would take in terms of cost to meet it, as well as what impact resource constraints, local government reorganisation and the establishment of the Mayoral Combined County Authority would have.</p> <p>Membership of the Reference Group consists of Place Scrutiny Committee members Cllrs Hilton, Redstone, Tutt and Wright and People Scrutiny Committee members Cllrs Cross and Field.</p>	March and April 2026
Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Reference Group	<p>The Committee has established a Reference Group, together with members of the Place Scrutiny Committee, to provide scrutiny input into the work related to Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).</p> <p>Membership of the Reference Group consists of all Place Scrutiny Committee members and People Scrutiny Committee members Cllrs Cross, Geary, and Howell.</p>	TBC
Children's Services Reforms	<p>The Committee agreed at its March 2025 meeting to convert the existing Prevention in Children's Services Reference Group and the Attendance Reference Group into a single Reference Group focused on national reforms relating to Children's Services, with a particular focus on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The Reference Group will consider the impact of these reforms on ESCC and scrutinise the Department's response to these. The Committee agreed to look at the recruitment of foster carers as part of this work.</p> <p>The Group met in June 2025 and received a presentation on key reforms in children's social care and the department's work in response to these, including the establishment of the Transformation Board. The Group agreed that the next meeting would focus on the Families First Programme.</p>	April 2026

	<p>At its 2025 awayday, the committee agreed to hold further meetings to focus on SEND pressures and reform.</p> <p>Membership of the Reference Group: Cllrs Belsey, Cross, Field, Geary and Howell and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative) (Chair)</p>	
CQC Reference Group	<p>The Committee agreed at its 2023 awayday to establish a Reference Group to support ASCH with the upcoming CQC inspection and LGA Peer Review.</p> <p>The Reference Group last met on 26 January and received a presentation from the Department on progress against the 2025 CQC findings as well as next steps in the CQC assessment cycle. The Group welcomed progress to date and discussed ongoing work with carers and as well as programmes of work focused on prevention and neighbourhood health.</p> <p>The Group agreed to next meet in the Spring to consider the updated self-assessment as part of its ongoing role to support the department with preparations for future CQC assessments.</p> <p>Membership of the Reference Group: Councillors Cross, Geary (Chair), Howell and Webb.</p>	TBC
Health and Social Care Integration Programme (HASCIP) Reference Group	<p>The Committee agreed to establish a Reference Group to monitor progress of the East Sussex Health and Social Care Integration Programme and identify areas for future scrutiny. It reviews HASCIP progress reports provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board and meets on an ad hoc basis as required to consider issues arising in more detail.</p> <p>The Group last met on 6 October 2025 to consider quarterly progress on the Shared Delivery Plan, focusing on Integrated Community Teams, hospital discharge, and the role of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Group also received an update on ongoing reforms to Integrated Care Boards and the wider NHS, discussing potential impacts for East Sussex.</p> <p>Membership of the group: Councillors Belsey, Clark, Geary (Chair) Howell and Webb.</p>	TBC
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) Board	RPPR Board meets annually to agree detailed comments and any recommendations on the emerging portfolio plans and spending and savings proposals to be put to Cabinet on behalf of the scrutiny committee.	Next meeting: December 2026
Reports for Information		
Subject Area	Detail	Proposed Date

Climate Change Health Impact Assessment	For the Committee to receive the final Climate Change Health Impact Assessment.	TBC 2026
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Training and Development

Title of Training/Briefing	Detail	Proposed Date
Schools White Paper	To receive a briefing on the Schools White Paper to develop Member's understanding of key reforms and implications on local services.	TBC (depending on publication of White Paper)

Future Committee Agenda Items

13 July 2026

		Author
Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	To commence the Committee's involvement with the RPPR process for 2027/28 financial year by reviewing the information in the Quarter 4 (end of year) (2025/26) Council Monitoring report and the 2026 State of the County report.	Chief Executive

21 September 2026

Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	The examine any additional information requested at the July meeting and consider any updated RPPR information for 2027/28.	Chief Executive
Safeguarding Adults Board - Annual Report	The Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) Annual Report outlines the safeguarding activity and performance in East Sussex during the previous financial year, as well as some of the main developments in place to prevent abuse from occurring.	Chair, Safeguarding Adults Board
Annual Review of Safer Communities	To update the Committee on performance in relation to Safer Communities in 2024/25 and the priorities and issues for 2026/27 that will be highlighted in the Partnership Business Plan.	Director of Adult Social Care and Health

23 November 2026

Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	The Committee will examine any additional information requested at the September meeting and consider any updated RPPR information for 2027/28.	Chief Executive
East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) Annual Report	Presentation of the annual report of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership.	Independent Chair, East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership
Items to consider for future work programme		

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Summary comments for Cabinet – People Scrutiny RPPR Board (11.12.25)

1.1. The People Scrutiny RPPR Board met on the 11 December 2025 and agreed comments to be put to Cabinet, on behalf of the parent Committee, for its consideration in January 2026. The information supplied to the Board to support its discussions comprised of:

- December RPPR Update report to Cabinet
- CIPFA local authority efficiency toolkit; and
- the draft portfolio plans for the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) and Children’s Services Departments (CSD)

1.2. The Board met before the provisional local government finance settlement 2026-2027 was published and therefore the Board was not able to comment in detail on the Council’s budgetary position.

1.3. The comments of the People Scrutiny RPPR Board are set out below:

Financial outlook

1.4 The Board expressed its concern about the financial position of the Council, although acknowledged the significant pressures facing local government and commented that there was insufficient funding for the sector to meet increasing demand for services and increasing complexity of need.

1.5 The Board discussed the outcome of the Government’s Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation and although it was acknowledged that detailed allocations would be set out in the awaited provisional local government finance settlement, the Board expressed concern about the impact new funding formulae were expected to have on ESCC.

1.6 The Board discussed the announcement in the Autumn Budget Statement that SEND will in future (from 2028/29) be funded through central Government and raised concerns that this would not address SEND deficits up to this point and that this funding would be at the detriment of other funding streams.

1.7 The Board expressed confidence that the Council had taken significant steps to address its financial deficit, including lobbying for additional funding, generating income, and implementing savings and efficiencies, and that the Council’s self-assessment against the CIPFA local authority efficiency toolkit provided a robust evidence base that efficiencies identified by other local authorities had also been explored.

1.8 The Board recognised the limited options remaining to set a balanced budget for 2026/27, including identifying further savings and preparing to seek Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), however expressed significant concerns about the impacts of these. The Board acknowledged the considerable number of savings previously made and, although accepted that the Council was still able to deliver its statutory duties, was very concerned about its ability to do so in the future if further savings were identified and the significant impact this would then have on residents, staff and partners. The Board commented that with increasing need and demand for services, further savings increased risk to vulnerable adult and children.

1.9 The Board discussed the proposed CSD saving to stop the payment of term-time accommodation for university students who are care leavers and expressed that

whilst the need for this saving was understood, in light of the financial context, it was regrettable that this support for care leavers would not continue.

1.0 The Board discussed the potential outcomes of applying for EFS and expressed concern about the prospect of raising Council Tax above the referendum limit, acknowledging that East Sussex residents already paid a relatively high rate, and wished to highlight that although permission to raise Council Tax significantly was unlikely, an increase of 18% would be necessary to fully address the deficit and set a balanced budget. In discussing the potential impact of receiving EFS in the form of permission for additional borrowing, the Board expressed concern about the increasing debt this would generate for the Council, and the subsequent impact this would have on East Sussex residents.

1.11 The Board discussed public awareness about the challenging financial context local government was operating in, noting some misconceptions, and highlighted the need for stronger messaging on increased demand, the impact on council services and ongoing sector challenges.

Children's Services draft portfolio plan

1.12 The Board received an overview from the Director of CSD of the draft CSD portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2026/2027.

1.13 The Board welcomed the priorities and developments contained within the plan and recognised the ambitious work to transform and provide services within a challenging context, including significant national reforms.

1.14 The Board welcomed the department's approach to addressing high demand and costs in Home to School Transport, however acknowledged that national reforms and legislative changes were needed to fully address ongoing challenges in SEND support.

Adult Social Care and Health draft portfolio plan

1.15 The Board received an overview from the Director of ASCH of the draft ASCH portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2026/2027.

1.16 The Board acknowledged the challenging context the department was operating in, with increased demand for services, and praised staff for their ongoing work to deliver statutory services.

1.17 The Board discussed wider financial challenges in the health sector, noting NHS funding pressures, and expressed the need to closely monitor the impacts of reductions and changes to Integrated Care Boards.

EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN

The Leader of the County Council is required to publish a forward plan setting out matters which the Leader believes will be the subject of a key decision by the Cabinet, individual Cabinet member or officer in the period covered by the Plan (the subsequent four months). The Council's Constitution states that a key decision is one that involves

- (a) expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the expenditure of the County Council's budget, namely above £500,000 per annum; or
- (b) is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions.

As a matter of good practice, the Council's Forward Plan includes other items in addition to key decisions that are to be considered by the Cabinet/individual members. This additional information is provided to inform local residents of all matters to be considered, with the exception of issues which are dealt with under the urgency provisions. Only key decisions to be taken by officers are included.

For each decision included on the Plan the following information is provided:

- Page 43
- the name of the individual or body that is to make the decision and the date of the meeting or relevant time period for an officer decision
 - the title of the report and decision to be considered
 - groups that will be consulted prior to the decision being taken
 - a list of documents that will be considered when making the decision
 - the name and telephone number of the contact officer for each item.

The Plan is updated and published every month on the Council's website two weeks before the start of the period to be covered.

Meetings of the Cabinet/individual members are open to the public (with the exception of discussion regarding reports which contain exempt/confidential information). Copies of agenda and reports for meetings are available on the website in advance of meetings. Key decisions taken by officers will not be taken at a meeting – documents listed can be made available on request to the contact officer, with the exception of those which contain exempt/confidential information.

For further details on the time of meetings and general information about the Plan please contact Hannah Matthews at County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, BN7 1UE, or telephone 01273 335138 or send an e-mail to hannah.matthews@eastsussex.gov.uk. For further detailed information regarding specific issues to be considered by the Cabinet, individual Member or officer please contact the named contact officer for the item concerned.

EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, BN7 1UE

For copies of reports or other documents please contact the officer listed on the Plan or phone 01273 335089.

FORWARD PLAN – EXECUTIVE DECISIONS (including Key Decisions) – 1 March 2026 to 30 June 2026

Additional notices in relation to Key Decisions and/or private decisions are available on the [Council's website](#).

Cabinet membership:

- Councillor Keith Glazier - Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development
- Councillor Nick Bennett – Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change
- Councillor Penny di Cara – Lead Member for Economy
- Councillor Claire Dowling – Lead Member for Transport and Environment
- Councillor Carl Maynard – Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health
- Councillor Bob Bowdler – Lead Member for Children and Families
- Councillor Bob Standley – Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date for Decision	Decision Taker	Decision/Key Issue	Decision to be taken wholly or partly in private (P) or Key Decision (KD)	Consultation	List of Documents to be submitted to decision maker	Contact Officer
2 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	Playing field adjacent to the Tilling Green Community Centre - Decision regarding disposal of the freehold interest On 25 September 2025, the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change considered the outcome of the responses from members of the public concerning the intention to dispose of the site. Approval was given to market the site on the open market. Following a marketing period, the Lead Member will consider offers made and the analysis. A decision will be made regarding the organisation that is to purchase the site.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Rebecca Lewis 07955 312371

2 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	Award of contract for school meals catering Approve the award of the school meals catering contract to the successful bidder following a competitive tender process. This contract award will be for a period of 5 years plus an option for an additional 2 years. The 2-year extension will be subject to contract performance.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Johnny Parish 07849 303899
9 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development	Eastbourne Fisherman's Quayside and infrastructure development project - reprofiling finances To consider proposals to reprofile the Growing Places Fund and East Sussex Invest loans for the Eastbourne Fisherman's Quayside and infrastructure development project.	P		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Alex Colbran 07729 108123
9 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development	Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act ('RIPA') and Investigative Powers Act ('IPA') update Set the policy for the year ahead as required by the Policy in relation to the use of covert investigative techniques.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Robert Freeman 01273 336715
10 Mar 2026	Cabinet	Council Monitoring Quarter 3 To consider the Council Monitoring report for the third quarter of the financial year 2025/26 as part of the Council's Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) budget monitoring process.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Victoria Beard 07894 708914

16 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Record Office Collections Policies Approval of updated 2025 collections policies for the East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Record Office, as required to maintain The National Archives' Accredited Archive status.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Anna Goddard 07734 301730
16 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	Capital Programme for Local Transport Improvements 2026/27 and allocation of Bus Service Improvement Plan Capital Grant for 2026/27 to 2029/30 To seek Lead Member approval, following consultation with local members, on the local transport schemes and associated expenditure included in the capital programme for design and/or delivery in 2026/27 and the allocation of the bus service improvement plan capital grant for the period up to 2029/30.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Andrew Keer 01273 336682
16 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	Experimental Traffic Regulation Order for Eastbourne Town Centre Movement and Access Package Phase 2a Terminus Road (Cornfield Road to Langney Road) Further to the Lead Member approval for Eastbourne Town Centre Movement and Access Package Phase 2a to progress to detailed design and construction, a further decision is required on the proposal to implement an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) on Phase 2a. This would facilitate a trial of the operating hours for the local traders and/or residents and pedestrians to identify the most suitable hours.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Emma Oakman 01273 481170

17 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Economy	Adult Skills Fund: 2026/27 Grant allocation and delivery Arrangements The Department for Work and Pensions is inviting East Sussex County Council to oversee an additional allocation of Adult Skills Fund (ASF) to commission training in the academic year 2026/27. The Lead Member for Economy will consider approval to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to take any actions necessary in relation to the implementation of the additional ASF funds.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Holly Aquilina 01323 463538
20 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	Crisis Resilience Fund To consider the proposed spend of the Crisis Resilience Fund in East Sussex, including services for adults.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Mark Hendriks 07701 394501
20 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	Extension of specialist sexual health services contract Consideration of a 2-year extension of specialist sexual health services contract as agreed at award. Current contract commenced 1 October 2024 on a 2+2+1 agreement. This represents the first extension of 2 years.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Tony Proom 01273 335252
20 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	Contract for the Circle Room young person's sexual health clinic service Award of contract to provide the Circle Room young person's clinic for 2 years, commencing on 1 April 2026.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Tony Proom 01273 335252

20 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	Contract for the Online sexual health service The current Online sexual health services contract ends on 31 October 2026. A decision is required to award a new contract which will be a 2+2 year contract ending on 31 October 2030. This means that an extension may be needed in 2028.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ross Boseley 07872 014434
23 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2026/2027 To seek Lead Member approval to publish a Childcare Sufficiency Duty report for 2026/27. The childcare sufficiency duty is a legal requirement for local authorities in England, under the Childcare Act 2006. Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare places "so far as is reasonably practicable".	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Jane Spice 01323 747425
23 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Children and Families	Crisis Resilience Fund To consider the proposed spend of the Crisis Resilience Fund in East Sussex, including services for Children and Families	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Mark Hendriks 07701 394501
31 Mar 2026	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	Write-off of Debts 2025/26 To seek Lead Member approval for writing off certain debts in excess of £10,000.	P		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Alina Dunn 01273 481250
March 2026	Chief Operating Officer	Oracle Programme Resources Modification of existing contract to incorporate the 2026/27 resource envelope, required to deliver the Oracle Programme.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ros Parker 01273 481412

March 2026	Director of Adult Social Care and Health	Contract for the provision of a county-wide Welfare Benefits and Money Advice Service To consider the use of a direct award to the current provider of the Welfare Benefits and Money Advice Service which would ensure the continuation of the service for a further 12 months following the end of the current contract so that a full tender process can be undertaken to meet the agreed objectives of the co-design and co-commissioning groups.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Tamsin Peart 07881 282732
March 2026 Page 49	Director of Adult Social Care and Health	Allocation of Government Funding for Substance Misuse Services 2026/27 The Council has received government funding for local substance misuse services. This decision will agree how that funding will be allocated so that specialist commissioned services can meet the aims of the Government's drug strategy, reduce drug and alcohol-related deaths in East Sussex, and support people affected by substance misuse to achieve positive outcomes.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Caz Kearton-Evans 07879 117579
Between 20 Mar 2026 and 31 Mar 2026	Director of Adult Social Care and Health	Modification to contract for the provision of the East Sussex Mental Health Support Service (MHSS) A national five year programme to expand and invest in Individual Placement and Support (IPS). IPS funding is increasing, but other Mental Health Support Service (MHSS) areas' funding is flat. With no uplift investment, commissioners have negotiated with the provider to adjust delivery within	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Mandi Edwards 07725 478260

		the same financial envelope. This modification is recording adjusted staffing levels (Full Time Equivalent), adjusting delivery arrangements and setting lower performance targets.				
9 Apr 2026	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2026-2027 Approve the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2026-27 academic year following the required consultation.	KD	Public consultation between 27/2//26 – 30/3/26 Areas - All Areas Audiences – Any interested parties Interests - Children and young people, Learning disability or difficulty, Support for parents, carers and young people, Public Transport	Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ian Crudge 03003 309472
April 2026	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport	Award of the Services Agreement contract for the processing and disposal of dry mixed recyclables The current Services Agreement for the processing and disposal of dry mixed	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Laura Tafa 07919 298462

		recyclables expires on 28 June 2026. The decision is to award the contract to the successful bidder following a competitive open tender process under the Procurement Regulations 2023 for a 10 year contract (5 plus 3 plus 2).				
April 2026 Page 51	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport	Modification of the Integrated Waste Management Services Contract (IWMSC) with Veolia to include tipping point services for the handling of dry mixed recyclables (DMR) The current contractual arrangement for the tipping and handling of DMR at local tipping points in East Sussex expires on 28 June 2026. A deed of variation is being drafted to continue to provide this service through the Integrated Waste Management Services Contract (IWMSC). The decision is to consider modification of the IWMCS with Veolia to include tipping point services for the handling of DMR.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Laura Tafa 07919 298462
May 2026	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport	Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections Construction Procurement To award the contract for the construction of Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections following a competitive tender process. The tender will be advertised via the Hampshire Gen 5 Framework early 2026. This decision was delegated by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport at a decision-making meeting on 10 November 2025.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ellie McDaniel 01273 335464

12 Jun 2026	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	<p>Changes to the process for disability-related expenditure within non-residential financial assessments</p> <p>To approve changes to the East Sussex County Council's disability-related expenditure process, to ensure all adults have an appropriate allowance for disability-related expenditure and allow the Council to reduce risk and comply with legal advice. If agreed, the changes would apply in new assessments from August 2026 and be applied to existing financial assessments as part of the annual review process, planned to begin in summer 2026.</p>	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ben Baker 07923 382464
22 Jun 2026 Page 52	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	<p>East Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2026-36: Public Consultation</p> <p>To consider the draft East Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2026 – 2036 and authorise public consultation on the draft strategy to commence.</p>			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Natalie Jamfield 01273 481409
30 Jun 2026	Cabinet	<p>A22 Major Road Network Corridor Package - Full business case and construction contract procurement</p> <p>To seek Cabinet approval to delegate to the Director for Communities, Economy and Transport, in discussion with the County's Section 151 Officer, to submit the full business case to the Department for Transport in relation to the A22 Major Road Network Corridor Package to secure Government funding towards the delivery of the scheme. In addition, Cabinet will consider whether to delegate approval to</p>	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Jon Wheeler, Rebecca Newby 01273 482212, 01273 336434

		the Director for Communities, Economy and Transport, to contract the construction of the scheme following Department for Transport approval of the full business case.				
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Report to:	People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	12 March 2026
By:	Chair of the Review Board
Title:	Scrutiny Review of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport
Purpose:	To present the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review and make recommendations

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the report of the Review Board.

1. Background

1.1 The People Scrutiny Committee, in response to increasing demand in Home to School Transport, undertook two scoping exercises in 2025 to better understand the issues impacting on the service, consider work underway to address these, and explore if scrutiny could add value by undertaking a review into this area. The Board explored the growing pressures on the Home to School Transport system, driven by rising demand; policy uncertainty, particularly around SEND reforms; current system challenges, including legal constraints; and measures being taken to ensure best value for money in delivering statutory school transport.

1.2 The Board considered that whilst there were statutory duties around Home to School Transport and that many of the cost drivers were outside the control of the Council, initiatives such as Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training could provide benefits for some families and achieve cost savings. Members therefore agreed that these initiatives should undergo further scrutiny through a review aimed at identifying ways to increase their uptake.

1.3 The Scoping Board agreed to focus on the following areas, which were subsequently agreed by the committee as the basis for the scrutiny review:

- The effectiveness of current Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training policies;
- Barriers to uptake and how these can be addressed; and
- How to effectively promote the availability and benefits of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training with parents, pupils and schools.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The Scrutiny Review Board was comprised of Councillors Belsey, Howell and Webb and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative). John Hayling was appointed Chair of the Review Board.

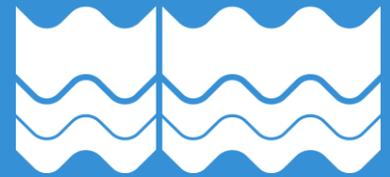
2.2 The attached report (Appendix 1) contains the findings and recommendations of the Review Board. Copies of evidence papers listed in the report and other support documentation are available on request from the contact officer.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the Review Board's report. In light of the timing of the election, the incoming committee will have the opportunity to consider the report and recommendations ahead of reporting to Cabinet and Council.

Councillor Johanna Howell
Chair of the Review Board

Contact Officer: Rachel Sweeney Tel: 07561267461
Email: rachel.sweeney@eastsussex.gov.uk



Scrutiny Review of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport

Report by the Review Board:

John Hayling, Parent Governor Representative
(Chair)

Councillor Colin Belsey

Councillor Johanna Howell

Councillor Trevor Webb

The report of the Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions

Contents

Recommendations	3
Introduction	5
Background	7
Local and National Context	7
National guidance	7
National statistics and research	7
Context in East Sussex	9
Review Board Findings	12
1. Value for money and wider outcomes from Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets	12
Value for money	12
Wider benefits	14
2. Barriers to uptake and participation	15
Practical barriers	15
Challenges for young people	16
Lack of awareness and the need for flexibility	17
Parental Concerns	17
3. Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training policy	18
Personal Travel Budgets	18
Independent Travel Training	19
4. Communication and Engagement	21
Communication strategies	21
Engagement	24
Conclusions	25
Appendix	27
Scope and terms of reference of the review	27
Board Membership and project support	27
Review Board meeting dates	27
Witnesses providing evidence	28
Evidence papers	28

Recommendations

The recommendations below reflect the Review Board’s consideration of the Council’s use of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training as part of Home to School Transport provision. The Review focused on how these offers support eligible pupils, predominantly children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), to develop independence, while ensuring best use of public resources.

Recommendation	Page
<p>1 The department should demonstrate the cost avoidance benefits of Independent Travel Training and develop a business case to expand the offer. This should take account of the wider benefits and the significance of Independent Travel Training in promoting long term independence and positive outcomes for young people, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include cost/benefit models for different delivery methods; and • consider the costs and benefits of providing bus passes to eligible post 16 pupils after they complete training to encourage participation. 	15
<p>2 The department should strengthen the implementation of its existing policies to ensure that frameworks supporting Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets are fully utilised to benefit families within the resources available, and, using any additional resource if secured through a successful business case, enhance the Independent Travel Training offer. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) regularly reviewing the implementation and uptake of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training, identifying and addressing barriers that prevent families from accessing these opportunities, to ensure policies are inclusive and accessible; b) working with schools to expand the availability of classroom based Independent Travel Training and identifying opportunities, where feasible, to increase the number of schools engaging with the offer and communicating it effectively to families; and c) introducing Independent Travel Training earlier and at key transition points by offering age appropriate training for younger pupils and promoting options for students to travel independently for part or all of their journey. 	21

3	<p>The department should develop a communication strategy to promote the benefits and opportunities of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training to parents, carers and schools; articulate how to apply and utilise these offers; and address parent/carers concerns. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) refreshed communications to parents and carers using behavioural insights to ensure families understand the offer and how it can promote independence, which is sent at appropriate times, including at transition; b) the use of stories and case studies to promote benefits and address parent/carers concerns; c) clear guidance and FAQs on applying for Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training, outlining program flexibility, long term benefits, and addressing common concerns; d) identifying opportunities to communicate the availability and benefits of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training to officers and elected Members to ensure they are well informed when engaging with parents, carers, and residents; and e) work with schools to promote independent travel early, and embed these aims in Education, Health and Care Plans. 	23
4	<p>The department should work with key stakeholders, including the Parent Carer Forum, SEND Strategy Governance Board and SEND Ambassador Forum, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) co-design Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training communications and policy materials, including resources aimed at parents and carers to build confidence within families on using public transport and supporting their child to travel independently; and b) ensure that young people’s views are shared with relevant stakeholders, including schools, transport providers and elected Members. 	24

Introduction

1. The People Scrutiny Committee, in response to increasing demand in Home to School Transport, undertook two scoping exercises in 2025 to better understand the issues impacting on the service, consider work underway to address these, and explore if scrutiny could add value by undertaking a review into this area. The Board explored the growing pressures on the Home to School Transport system, driven by rising demand; policy uncertainty, particularly around SEND reforms; current system challenges, including legal constraints; and measures being taken to ensure best value for money in delivering statutory school transport.

2. The Board carefully considered the remit of the Review and acknowledged several limiting factors, including the Council's statutory responsibilities and the anticipated impact of the forthcoming School White Paper. While the details of the White Paper were still unknown at the time of the meetings, officers expected it to emphasise inclusion in mainstream education for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), alongside potential changes to the framework for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). It was also expected to address the high costs of Home to School Transport by promoting national best practices such as increased use of public transport, active travel, enhanced Personal Travel Budgets, and Independent Travel Training—all of which can provide benefits to pupils and families, as well as opportunities for cost savings.

3. The Board recognised that anticipated reforms were causing anxiety amongst parents and carers and considered that the Review should focus on areas of work that were likely to have increased prominence in national policy related to school transport, as well as considering support and guidance that could be offered to parents and carers responding to any changes.

4. Members therefore agreed that the Review should explore what the Council could do to raise awareness of, and increase the uptake of, Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training and to focus on the following lines of enquiry:

1. Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training policies

- How effective are current Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training policies in promoting independence and delivering value for money?
- Are there best practices from other local authorities that could be adopted?

2. Barriers to uptake

- What are the key reasons families decline Personal Travel Budgets or Independent Travel Training and how can these be addressed?

3. Communication and engagement

- How does the Council currently promote the benefits of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training to parents, pupils and schools and how effective are those strategies?
- How can elected members, through engagement with their communities, raise awareness and promote the benefits of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training?

5. The Review looked at a range of evidence including information provided by the Children's Services Department (CSD), internal data, external reports and case studies, and heard from a range of internal and external witnesses. The Board was keen to include youth voice as part of the Review and would like to thank the young people who shared their views and experiences as part of a discussion at a SEND Ambassador Forum.

6. Whilst the Review focussed on what can be done to increase the uptake of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in East Sussex, the Board recognised the wider national context of increased demand for both SEND support and Home to School Transport, significant cost pressures, and upcoming changes in national reforms. The Board also acknowledged that Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training are not appropriate for all pupils and recommendations therefore focus on the Council's role in encouraging uptake amongst eligible pupils.

7. The Board in developing its recommendations was mindful of the significant financial challenges facing the Council and agreed that consideration of recommendations and subsequent action plans should be viewed within this context.

Background

Local and National Context

National guidance

8. The Department for Education guidance *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age* sets out the statutory responsibilities for local authorities in England, as defined by the Education Act 1996 in assisting with transport to school where eligibility criteria relating to distance or specific needs are met. This guidance provides clarification on local authorities' duties, particularly in relation to pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

9. Recent updates to this guidance place increased emphasis on ensuring that children with EHCPs can access the nearest suitable provision and highlight the importance of sustainability and independence in travel arrangements. Local authorities are required to promote sustainable and active travel options and encourage the uptake of Independent Travel Training, especially for eligible pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

10. Local authorities do not have to provide free or subsidised post 16 travel support but do have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport, or other support that the authority considers necessary, to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training. Councils are expected to target this support at those who need it most.

11. Since the Review Board concluded its evidence gathering, the Government published its Schools White Paper: *Every child achieving and thriving*. The Paper places a strong emphasis on inclusion, preparation for adulthood and supporting children and young people with SEND to develop independence and life skills. The White Paper also highlights the need for greater sustainability and value for money across SEND systems and related services. The Paper does not set out detailed proposals on Home to School Transport.

National statistics and research

12. Increasing demand and costs for Home to School Transport have been experienced nationally; published reports and case studies have sought to explore the reasons for these increases and identify ways to reduce pressure on services and council budgets.

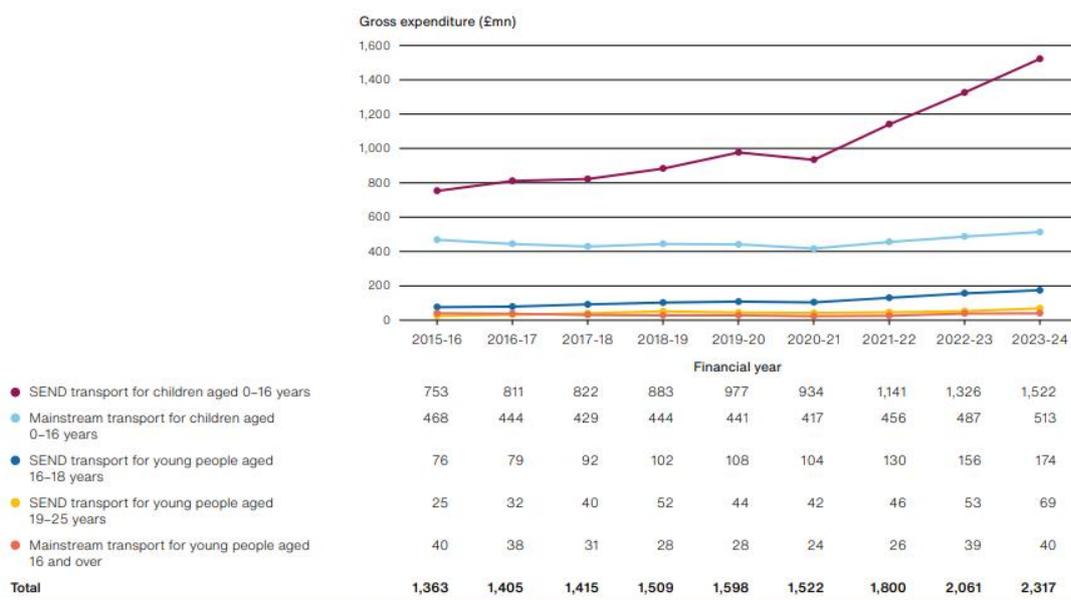
13. The National Audit Office Report *Home to School Transport* sets out that in 2023-24, local authorities spent £2.32 billion transporting an estimated 520,000 pupils to school or college. It recognises the benefits of Home to School Transport to pupils and families, however, notes that an increase in demand (a 70% increase in real terms

between 2015/16 - 2023/24) and rising costs for travel for pupils with SEND, is placing significant pressure on council budgets.

14. The graph below illustrates that spending increased most significantly after 2020-21; almost three quarters of this increase was on transporting pupils aged 0-16 with SEND.

Real terms gross expenditure on home to school transport in England, 2015-16 to 2023-24 (2023-24 prices)

Real terms expenditure on home to school transport for children aged 0-16 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) increased substantially after 2020-21



15. The report highlights a range of initiatives by local authorities to respond to rising demand and costs including the promotion of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training; managing markets; route optimisation and reducing single occupancy (solo transport); and use of alternative transport, including sourcing fleets of vehicles. The report makes several recommendations to the Department for Education, including ensuring forthcoming SEND reforms consider Home to School Transport, improving data collection, and monitoring the impact of Home to School Transport funding formulae on different types of authority.

16. The County Councils Network (CCN) report *From Home to the Classroom: Making Travel to School Services Sustainable* says that without considerable policy reforms, both costs and demand are likely to keep growing and notes that per capita expenditure is significantly higher for CCN member authorities, mainly due to their rural geographies. The report sets out that increasing the uptake of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training can be cost saving measures, as well as providing benefits for young people's independence. However, it also notes variations in provision of these offers and the challenges faced by rural authorities with limited public transport.

17. The Local Government Association (LGA) report *The Future of Home to School Transport* recognises the key role Home to School Transport plays in supporting families

and enabling children to get to school, including reducing barriers to attendance faced by some families with children with SEND. It also examines the cost drivers of Home to School Transport and sets out core principles to guide the direction of future policy, including recommendations to Government on eligibility; where transport should be provided from and to; modes of transport; and funding. Recommendations include expanding use of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets.

18. The ADEPT *SEND Transport Toolkit* provides a practical resource for local authorities. It highlights test initiatives and case studies aimed to increase efficiencies and reduce costs in Home to School Transport through route planning and optimisation, use of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets, commissioning, and supplier management. Impacts from initiatives include cost avoidance, better use of resources, improved outcomes for children and adults and, for some initiatives, reduced demand for school transport.

Context in East Sussex

19. East Sussex County Council’s (ESCC) policies on Home to School Transport follow statutory duties under the Education Act 1996 and align with the updated Department for Education guidance.

20. Travel assistance is available for children of compulsory school age who meet statutory criteria, such as meeting distance thresholds, encountering unsafe walking routes, having Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), or belonging to low income families. The policy sets out the forms of provision ESCC offers, including dedicated school transport (e.g. taxis, minibuses), public transport passes, and Personal Travel Budgets. All discretionary offers of assistance are reviewed on a case by case basis at the SEND Travel Panel.

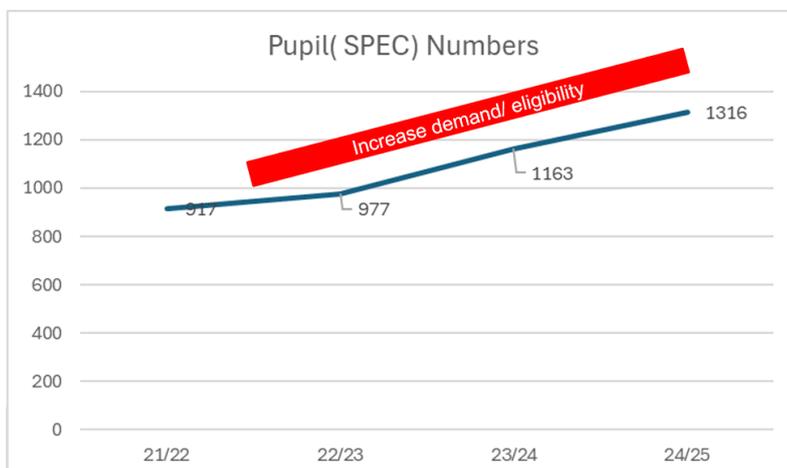
21. The May 2025 school census recorded 67,097 pupils attending primary, secondary and special schools in East Sussex. As at the end of September (quarter 2) 2025, there were 5,028 pupils in receipt of Home to School Transport support, as set out in the table below:

Category	Pupils Sep 2025
Public Transport	1792
Mileage Allowance	53
Coach	1168
Personal Travel Budget	214
Minibus & Shared Taxi	1623
Solo Taxi	178
Total number of pupils	5028

22. The ESCC Post-16 Transport Policy Statement sets out the support available for sixth form students and learners aged 19 or over with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), to enable them to access education or training. Support options may be provided by the County Council, schools, colleges, or transport operators, and the Statement details information on fares, concessions, financial assistance and travel support policies for EHCP learners. Some eligible students may benefit from council arranged transport, such as taxis or minibuses. To be eligible, learners must have an EHCP, be unable to travel independently, and attend the nearest suitable placement. The policy also outlines the requirement for parents and carers to prioritise transporting the young person where possible, and an annual contribution fee for approved travel assistance.

23. The ESCC budget for Home to School Transport in 2024/25 was £23m and the department overspent by £3.8m; transport for pupils with SEND accounted for the majority of spend. Mirroring the national trend, the department has seen a significant increase in demand and eligibility for Home to School Transport in the last three years (outlined in the graph below) due to an increase in the number of EHCPs being issued and the number of children eligible for Home to School Transport support.

24. The department has also reported rising transport costs due to inflationary factors, vehicle costs, fuel, drivers and Passenger Assistants (PAs) as well as increasing demand for alternative provision and transport requests for services including Teaching Learning Provision, Interim Provision Service and East Sussex Academy.



Percentage increase year on year	
22/23	7%
23/24	19%
24/25	13%

25. In response to this increase, the department has adopted a range of measures to manage costs whilst continuing to meet statutory duties, including route optimisation; a review of commissioning arrangements and supplier management; reducing the number of solo taxi journeys and increasing vehicle occupancy; an enhanced Personal Travel Budget strategy; promotion of Independent Travel Training; an eligibility review; and increasing the use of public transport. The department continues to collaborate with other authorities to share best practice and learning. These initiatives have slowed the rise in unit costs in recent years.

Personal Travel Budgets

26. ESCC offers Personal Travel Budgets to eligible pupils with an EHCP aged 5-25. The budget is provided to families to support costs of travel to school or college; parents/carers are responsible for organising the travel and do not have to report how the money is used. The current standard offer is 45p per mile.

27. An enhanced strategy offering 65p per mile for pupils on solo transport has launched more recently and been offered to 184 families where pupils are currently using solo transport. At quarter 2 2025, 10 families had accepted the offer. In responding to why a Personal Travel Budget was not suitable, the most common reason was that families were happy with their current arrangement.

Independent Travel Training

28. The ESCC Independent Travel Training offer supports young people with SEND in developing the skills and confidence needed to travel independently to school or college. Delivered by National Star, the programme is available to those with an EHCP and includes home visits, classroom sessions, and family support. The programme is responsive to individual needs, with suitability assessed for each participant, and ongoing work is focused on expanding access, addressing parental concerns, and benchmarking against other local authorities.

29. Whilst Independent Travel Training is available to all pupils of statutory school age, with classroom based sessions offered to younger secondary pupils, the core delivery of practical training to use public transport is focused on pupils aged over 16. A young person's independence is formally considered as part of the eligibility assessment for post 16 travel assistance.

30. Once Independent Travel Training has been successfully completed, post 16 learners who are assessed as able to travel independently no longer receive additional travel assistance. For pupils under the age of 16, eligibility for travel assistance remains unchanged. Where a younger pupil completes travel training, they continue to receive the appropriate form of support, such as a bus pass, where they meet the statutory eligibility criteria.

Review Board Findings

1. Value for money and wider outcomes from Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets

31. The Board considered a range of evidence and heard from key witnesses about the cost benefits of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets, as well as wider benefits for pupils and families.

Value for money

32. National evidence and local authority case studies highlight increasing the use of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training as key measures to reduce Home to School Transport costs, with some councils achieving significant savings through these initiatives and many councils developing their offer.

Personal Travel Budgets

33. The National Audit Office report states that Personal Travel Budgets can offer families greater flexibility and control and are often more cost effective than other transport services. CCN cites increasing the use of Personal Travel Budgets as a key element of councils' strategies to manage Home to School Transport costs and reports one council achieving £4m of savings through reducing solo taxi usage and increasing uptake of Personal Travel Budgets.

34. The Board heard that ESCC's enhanced offer of 65p per mile for pupils currently using solo transport had generated an estimated £221,000 annual saving as reported at quarter 2 2025. Wider uptake, particularly among pupils who currently receive solo taxi provision, would offer further financial efficiencies.

Independent Travel Training

35. On Independent Travel Training, the National Audit Office report notes that it is not only effective at promoting independence and achieving cost savings in Home to School Transport, but 'additional long-term savings may also arise across other services, such as adult social care, as individuals gain greater independence.'

36. The Board heard from the Services Manager for School Services at Sheffield City Council which had recently expanded its Independent Travel Training offer with additional investment. He commented that, although the full financial impact of Independent Travel Training was difficult to quantify, modelling suggested it offered strong value for money across a pupil's education, as well as wider social benefits. Testimonies from parents, carers and pupils in Sheffield demonstrated the positive impact it had had on their lives and the Service Manager noted that the Independent Travel Training team was working with departments across the council to realise the wider impacts of Independent Travel Training, including increased confidence in social interactions, independence and being part of a community.

37. Analysis undertaken by CSD indicated that Independent Travel Training could provide realistic opportunities for cost avoidance through more effective use of existing resources. Independent Travel Training costs an average of £2,750 per pupil. By comparison, the average annual cost of Home to School Transport for pupils attending schools that currently participate in Independent Travel Training ranges from £7,734 to £18,112 per child.

38. The table below sets out the schools that currently work with National Star to support pupils to complete Independent Travel Training; the number of pupils who have successfully completed the programme per school since 2020, and the average cost of transporting a pupil to each school. It also outlines the average annual potential savings realised when a student transitions from arranged transport to independent travel.

Costs avoided: average unit cost per school (Jan 25)

School	Number of pupils enrolled in 2024/25	Pupils who have completed Independent Travel Training since 2020	Average transport cost per child per £/Day	Average annual potential cost avoided per child
The Lindfield School	119	73	54.57	£10,260
Hazel Court School	77	61	80.54	£15,302
Acre Wood Academy (formerly Grove Park)	141	86	87.49	£16,623
Hazel Court FE	59	15	95.33	£18,112
Hailsham Community College	1078	14	40.71	£7734

39. In 2024-25, 22 pupils were successfully trained (the programme achieves a 96% success rate of children undertaking the course converting to independent travel). The Board considered that increasing the number of eligible learners completing Independent Travel Training could further reduce reliance on high cost transport arrangements, particularly solo taxi provision. The Board also noted that the programme had a waiting list of six pupils, demonstrating immediate scope to support additional learners. The Board was informed that Bristol City Council was expanding Independent Travel Training to better manage Home to School Transport costs. To address the financial barriers some families faced in accessing public transport, and to promote participation in training, bus passes were provided to eligible students upon completion of the programme. This

initiative aimed to increase uptake and decrease dependency on taxis with the cost of passes more than offset by the savings in direct transport provision.

40. The Board considered this in the context of recent changes to bus fares in East Sussex following the end of additional national funding, and the impact this will have on some pupils. The Parent Carer Forum Chair also highlighted concerns about ongoing costs to use public transport once training had been completed as a barrier to uptake.

Wider benefits

41. National evidence indicates that Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training provide significant benefits to pupils and families, including ‘greater confidence, independence and the ability to take part more fully in their community’.

42. The LGA recommends that school travel support should ‘contribute to building the skills that children and young people need for independence in their adult lives’. In consulting with young people with SEND during the production of the LGA’s report, elected Members reflected that young people had a ‘strong appetite to travel independently and as they got older resented some of the restrictions and perceived stigma around the provision of dedicated transport’. However, the report also notes some challenges and limitations with these initiatives, including some parent/carer concerns about the adequacy and practicality of Personal Travel Budgets, challenges in councils having the resources to sustain the programmes, and the limitations of public transport in rural areas (barriers to uptake of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training are further explored in the next section).

43. The Board also considered the wider benefits of Independent Travel Training through testimonials from parents whose children had completed the training in East Sussex who noted increased confidence and independence in young people. The National Star Travel Training Team Coordinator emphasised the importance of developing independence as young people prepare for adulthood and that Independent Travel Training could support the development of essential life skills. The Deputy Head at Lindfield School also highlighted these benefits; as well as supporting pupils to travel independently, he cited increased opportunities, support with transition to college and work, independence more generally and better communication skills.

“X absolutely loved his Travel Training... In fact now he loves planning lots of different bus journeys to places we’ve never been before”

Mother of ESCC child who completed ITT, Dec 2024

Conclusions

44. Although Members recognised that Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training could only partially offset high transport costs, the Board concluded that given the increasing pressure on the Home to School Transport budget, and the benefits Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training can offer families, the Council

should seek to increase uptake of these offers and welcomed the introduction of the enhanced Personal Travel Budget offer. With further promotion and guidance on how Personal Travel Budgets could be used (explored further in sections 3 and 4), there was an opportunity to increase the uptake of this offer and achieve further savings, as well as offering greater flexibility to families.

45. In discussions with officers about opportunities to expand Independent Travel Training, the Board heard that there was scope for this, however, any proposed increase in provision would require clear evidence demonstrating its effectiveness as a cost avoidance strategy. The Board acknowledged that providing robust evidence of cost savings or avoided expenditure would be essential in justifying additional investment and scaling up the Independent Travel Training programme.

46. The Board recognised the potential impact from changes to bus fares for young people, particularly in relation to participation in the Independent Travel Training programme. It was noted that any additional support, such as providing bus passes, would only apply to post 16 learners, as pupils of statutory school age would continue to be eligible for travel assistance even after completing Independent Travel Training. However, the Board also recognised that the majority of pupils who complete the training and successfully move to independent travel are post 16. While resources remain limited, the Board agreed that supporting and incentivising young people to transition from taxis to public transport could generate cost avoidance for the Council and provide wider benefits for young people. Therefore, options to encourage and assist post 16 learners to use public transport should be explored.

Recommendation 1

The department should demonstrate the cost avoidance benefits of Independent Travel Training and develop a business case to expand the offer. This should take account of the wider benefits and the significance of Independent Travel Training in promoting long term independence and positive outcomes for young people, and:

- **include cost/benefit models for different delivery methods; and**
- **consider the costs and benefits of providing bus passes to eligible post 16 pupils with an EHCP after they complete training to encourage participation.**

2. Barriers to uptake and participation

47. Although there are clear benefits for many pupils and families from the uptake of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets, the Board heard that there were some barriers which made these options either unsuitable, or undesirable.

Practical barriers

48. The Board considered insights from the East Sussex Parent Carer Forum (PCF) Chair who shared parent/carer experiences on Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel

Training. Some parents reflected that arranging transportation with a Personal Travel Budget could be challenging due to work schedules, unsuitable or unavailable wrap around care, and siblings attending different schools—making it difficult for parents and carers to transport multiple children. For families with varying weekly arrangements, such as part-time work, it was uncertain whether Personal Travel Budgets could be used flexibly to meet different travel needs on different days.

49. These practical barriers were also reported in written testimonies from parents/carers who had declined a Personal Travel Budget. Karen, a foster carer, cited transportation difficulties for families with children at both distant special schools and local mainstream schools, as well as limited wrap around care and other commitments. Karen cares for L, who has severe learning disabilities and anxiety; she declined the offer because the current taxi and Passenger Assistant (PA) arrangement ensures a calm journey that helps L prepare for school. Karen praised the taxi driver and PA for their support.

50. In another testimony Lisa, a parent of three children, one of whom L has complex needs and attends a special school 30 minutes away, had experienced a range of transport arrangements over the years. She praised her current arrangement of a taxi and PA as she said they were able to provide her daughter with the one-to-one support she needs when travelling. She noted that significant media coverage on the costs of Home to School Transport could make parents feel guilty but noted that for some families it was the only viable option.

51. Rural counties like East Sussex present additional challenges to participating in Independent Travel Training. The Independent Travel Training Lead and PCF Chair noted that route suitability and access to public transport are barriers for some journeys, which reflected findings from the National Audit Office that the availability of public transport in rural areas and the capacity to appoint and train suitable staff were ‘significant constraints’.

Challenges for young people

52. To gain deeper insight into the challenges that young people may encounter when participating in Independent Travel Training, Board members attended a SEND Ambassador Forum and engaged in discussions with seven students ranging from Year 7 to university level.

53. Participants described a range of experiences with travel to school or college, including walking, use of public transport, taxis, and being driven by family members. They all noted barriers to accessing public transport, including accessibility barriers (including a lack of audio announcements), crowded buses and boarding/seating challenges for wheelchair users or those with visual impairment as well as other

“Being taught how to take public transport is important for safety and independence”

SEND Ambassador

disabilities. Young people also highlighted a lack of awareness from members of the public about accessibility needs. Despite these barriers, participants saw the value in Independent Travel Training (with many of them having undertaken this informally with family members) as a way to enable greater independence by developing confidence and practical skills.

Lack of awareness and the need for flexibility

54. The Board found that awareness of both Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training remained limited among families and young people. Several young people attending the SEND Ambassador Forum were not familiar with the Independent Travel Training programme, despite valuing the idea of gaining independence.

55. The Board found that although ESCC policies allow for Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training to be adapted to individual circumstances, including flexible use, part-week arrangements and trial periods, families were often unaware of this.

56. The PCF Chair noted that families often declined Personal Travel Budgets due to unclear or outdated information about the application process and policies, especially regarding return trips and budget flexibility.

57. The PCF Chair suggested families may be more interested in taking up a Personal Travel Budget if they could be reassured that support would still be available when needed, for example due to illness or for families with limited support networks, and that it could be used flexibly to accommodate changing circumstances.

58. The Board also heard that some parents/carers were anxious about losing support they were previously entitled to if they decided a Personal Travel Budget was no longer suitable but that the offer of a trial period could mitigate this. This was reiterated by the Services Manager at Sheffield City Council who told that Board that some families felt they had had to fight for SEND support and were concerned about losing this if they explored alternative arrangements that turned out to be unsuitable.

Parental Concerns

59. The Travel Training Team Coordinator told the Board that parental anxiety about safety and their child's readiness was a significant barrier to the uptake of Independent Travel Training. She explained that positive support at home is crucial for successful training, as children are more likely to engage if their parents are encouraging and described efforts to support parents, including the introduction of parent training sessions and increased engagement with schools to foster positive attitudes towards independence. The SEND Children and Young People (CYP) Participation Lead and participants at the SEND Ambassador Forum cited parental anxiety as a major barrier to young people using public transport.

60. The PCF Chair noted an existing culture of distrust towards local authorities, with some parents/carers perceiving the offer of initiatives such as Personal Travel Budgets

and Independent Travel Training as purely cost saving measures for the Council. It was therefore crucial that the benefits of these initiatives for some families were articulated.

Conclusions

61. Although a number of barriers were identified by witnesses, and some of these were outside the Council's control (rurality for example), the Board found that several could be overcome through ensuring that use of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training can be adapted in a way that suited individual circumstances. Officers informed the Board that both Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training allow for flexible use, including trial periods and the ability to use these for part of a journey and/or for part of the week, however, families often lacked this information. Further consideration is given to policies and the role of communications and engagement in increasing uptake in the following sections.

3. Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training policy

62. The Board considered current ESCC policies for Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training and considered if changes to these could reduce barriers and encourage uptake.

63. The Board noted that ESCC's Home to School Transport policy incorporates Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training as part of a graduated, sustainable offer for eligible children and young people with SEND. Although the Board was assured that the Council's core policies for Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training reflected those of other local authorities and national guidance, Members did consider ways in which some councils were developing offers to make them more accessible and attractive to families.

Personal Travel Budgets

64. A Personal Travel Budget is offered where it represents the most appropriate and efficient form of support and provides families with a financial allocation that they may use flexibly to meet their child's travel needs without needing to itemise expenditure. Budgets can be used to support travel costs, as well as other arrangements that enable parents to transport their child to school, for example childcare. Funding is determined by distance and attendance requirements.

65. The Board considered how ESCC's approach to Personal Travel Budgets compared to other councils. The standard offer of 45p per mile, and the enhanced offer of 65p per mile for individuals on solo transport compares positively when benchmarked against other local authorities, most of which retain only the standard 45p rate or operate banded schemes based on distance travelled and pay higher rates only for longer journeys.

66. The Board heard that the enhanced Personal Travel Budget rate of 65p per mile was introduced following national benchmarking in 2025, which showed that while 45p

remained the standard offer across most authorities, a small few provided an increased rate. The 65p level was assessed as offering a meaningful incentive for families, recognising both the additional time commitment and the adjustments many parents would need to make to their work or caring arrangements in order to take on daily transport. Although a higher rate of 75p (as offered by some other authorities) was considered, the department concluded that further work was first needed to extend uptake of the existing 65p offer. This offer will be reviewed as part of wider Home to School Transport monitoring, including any policy changes arising from the forthcoming Schools White Paper.

Independent Travel Training

67. Independent Travel Training offers structured, personalised one-to-one training for eligible learners, enabling them to develop the skills and confidence needed to travel safely and independently by public transport or on foot, with delivery tailored to age, need and pace of progression. Independent Travel Training is typically offered to pupils in year 10 onwards, although some younger people had completed the training. The Council also works with local special schools to deliver classroom sessions.

68. Cornwall Council had changed the way it delivered Independent Travel Training to encourage participation. The Board heard that when the training had been delivered by the Council, there had been scepticism by some parents as this initiative was seen as a cost saving exercise. The model was changed to deliver training in partnership with the Careers Team to embed an Independent Travel Training syllabus within schools and develop the offer to include journeys to further education and potential employers. Officers reported they had received positive feedback from young people, parents and staff on this approach.

69. The Board also heard from Sheffield City Council which was working with primary schools to develop travel training classroom resources to support transition to secondary school, including a toolkit for parents which aimed to increase parent confidence in travel training.

70. The Board recognised pupil and parental anxiety about young people travelling on public transport, particularly in responding to unforeseen circumstances such as cancelled services or breakdowns and considered whether a 'buddy system' could provide reassurance. Officers emphasised that Independent Travel Training is designed to equip young people to manage such situations safely, including seeking help from staff and contacting parents or carers. However, officers highlighted significant practical and safeguarding challenges associated with any formal buddy arrangement, including the inability to monitor travel in real time, uncertainties around liability, and issues relating to suitability, insurance and DBS requirements. It was therefore considered that such arrangements would be difficult to implement within current resources, and that greater emphasis should be placed on promoting the coping and problem solving elements of Independent Travel Training to parents and pupils.

71. The Board considered whether Independent Travel Training should be offered to younger pupils in order to prepare them for travel post 16. The Services Manager at Sheffield City Council suggested that Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) should use their expertise to help families identify long term travel aspirations early on, embed these into EHCPs and continue conversations with parents and carers about how their child will travel to school; this was particularly key when planning transition to the next school. This was reiterated by the Deputy Headteacher at Lindfield School, who told the Board that conversations about Independent Travel Training should start at an early age to prepare both pupils and parents/carers.

72. The National Star Travel Training Team Coordinator told the Board that typically pupils were not ready for Independent Travel Training until they were in Year 9, often due to route suitability and pupil readiness. However, the Assistant Director, Communication, Planning and Performance suggested that earlier intervention - especially during the transition from primary to secondary school - could enable more young people to travel independently to their local schools, reducing reliance on taxis and fostering greater independence.

73. Although witnesses and evidence suggested that not all pupils would be ready for full Independent Travel Training at a young age, there was evidence to support that gradual introduction to Independent Travel Training at a younger age, including classroom training and conversations about long term aspirations, could increase the success of independent travel later on.

74. The Board heard that National Star currently provides classroom sessions to three schools, including Lindfield School. The Deputy Headteacher informed the Board that these sessions were embedded into the curriculum to gradually introduce pupils to public transport and commented that although one-to-one Independent Travel Training support was time and staff intensive, classroom sessions had the potential to introduce a greater number of pupils to independent travel and encourage pupils to share these lessons and raise awareness of the benefits of independent travel with parents.

Conclusions

75. The Board concluded that, while ESCC's existing Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training policies aligned with national practice (and the enhanced Personal Travel Budget offered a greater incentive than that offered by other authorities), they were not being fully realised in practice. Families often lacked clarity about how flexibly these offers could be used, were uncertain about eligibility and the possibility of trial periods and expressed concerns about losing existing support or managing complex family arrangements, which was preventing uptake.

76. Evidence also demonstrated that early conversations in schools, clearer guidance, and gradual preparatory activities, such as classroom-based travel training, could meaningfully improve readiness and uptake. The Board therefore concluded that, rather than making any changes to policy, strengthening the implementation and communication

of current policies would enable more eligible families to benefit from these offers within existing resources. If additional resources could be secured through a successful business case, the Board agreed that this should be used to enhance the Independent Travel Training programme to offer a gradual approach to travel independence to pupils from a young age.

Recommendation 2.

The department should strengthen the implementation of its existing policies to ensure that frameworks supporting Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets are fully utilised to benefit families within the resources available, and, using any additional resource if secured through a successful business case, enhance the Independent Travel Training offer. This should include:

- a) regularly reviewing the implementation and uptake of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training, identifying and addressing barriers that prevent families from accessing these opportunities, to ensure policies are inclusive and accessible;
- b) working with schools to expand the availability of classroom based Independent Travel Training and identifying opportunities, where feasible, to increase the number of schools engaging with the offer and communicating it effectively to families; and
- c) introducing Independent Travel Training earlier and at key transition points by offering age appropriate training for younger pupils and promoting options for

4. Communication and Engagement

77. Whilst considering that use of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training should remain a choice for families, the Board heard that communication strategies could raise awareness of these offers and the potential benefits and encourage further uptake. The Board also considered the role of parents, schools and young people in shaping communications and policies.

Communication strategies

78. The Board heard that ESCC currently communicates the availability of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training through several channels. Information is included in the travel assistance application form, and letters are sent to parents following successful applications, as well as in subsequent correspondence, such as when explaining changes to entitlement for post-16 learners. Letters outlining the Independent Travel Training offer are issued directly to eligible pupils, either in Years 7-8 or Years 9-11. Information is also published on the Council website. Officers also explained that schools make referrals where appropriate. However, as noted in the section on barriers, the Board found that awareness of both the availability and scope of these offers was limited among families and young people.

79. SEND Ambassadors reviewed communications on Independent Travel Training and fed back that leaflets and newsletters appeared to be aimed at service providers rather than young people and that they did not clearly outline the benefits of developing independence or support for young people with anxiety that they would find useful. They emphasised that Independent Travel Training could really benefit young people with SEND and that improved advertising was needed to increase awareness and improve uptake.

80. The Board reviewed national evidence which underscored the need for clear and proactive communication to build trust and support informed choices. Findings from *Contact's School Transport Survey 2024 for parents with disabled children* showed that parents' biggest source of frustration was delays and inconsistencies in communication, particularly at key points such as the start of a school year or during transport assessments.

81. The Board heard from the CSD Marketing Communications Account Manager that communication strategies rooted in 'nudge' principles (approaches that steer people in certain directions while maintaining their freedom of choice) had the potential to improve clarity and uptake of Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets. She highlighted opportunities in ESCC communications to front load key messages, make benefits explicit and consistent, and create a 'choice architecture' to prompt families to consider these offers at each stage. The Board also heard that using relatable and engaging messaging, such as videos that share real life stories and experiences of parents and young people could foster trust and encourage wider uptake.

82. The Board explored how communications could allay fears that support would be withdrawn if these offers were not suitable. The Marketing Communications Account Manager suggested that communications should make clear that families would continue to have a choice about transport and that messaging should be explicit that Independent Travel Training enhances, rather than diminishes, options, and that Personal Travel Budgets can be used to support travel in different ways.

83. This approach was tested by Cornwall Council which worked with parent/carer groups to adapt the language used in communications to ensure information is clear and that expectations around travel are realistic. The Board heard that information about travel policy was communicated at key EHCP process points to reinforce the role of the Council and of parents/carers in considering how a child will travel to school. Communications on Home to School Transport focused on promoting independence and alternative solutions such as Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training. Witnesses from Cornwall Council reported that whilst demand for SEND support continued to increase, there had been a slowing of the rate of increase in demand for Home to School Transport.

84. The East Sussex PCF Chair told the Board that recent changes to policy, including the expanded definition of journey time, could make Personal Travel Budgets more attractive and should be emphasised when engaging with families. She also suggested providing comprehensive guidance on both the application and practical use of Personal

Travel Budgets, including their flexibility to meet individual family needs, and that letters to parents/carers should promote the wider benefits of these offers, as well as recognising parental concerns and anxieties. However, the PCF Chair also commented that correspondence should be targeted to eligible families who could benefit from these offers, otherwise there was a risk more general communication would be viewed as a cost saving exercise by the Council.

85. The Board considered the timing of communications. The PCF suggested that letters should be sent out multiple times to recognise changing circumstances. The Board heard that transition from primary to secondary was a key opportunity for families to consider future travel arrangements, however they also heard that conversations about Independent Travel Training should start at an early age to build in long term aspirations for children with SEND. This was emphasised by the Services Manager at Sheffield City Council who was strengthening relationships with primary schools and SENCOs to embed these aspirations into EHCPs and time offers effectively.

86. The Marketing Communications Account Manager identified collaboration with schools as an essential strategy to increase referrals to Independent Travel Training and enhance parental engagement with Council initiatives. This was endorsed by the Deputy Head of Lindfield School who observed that parents generally respond positively to schools regarding transport matters due to established trust. The Board concurred, acknowledging that schools are pivotal in communicating key messages, identifying suitable pupils for referral, and maintaining credibility with parents.

87. The Board also heard that Cornwall had developed internal relationships to increase understanding of Home to School Transport challenges across relevant teams and with elected Members. Members agreed that a greater awareness across ESCC of these offers, and a greater understanding of the wider context of Home to School Transport challenges, could support both officers and elected Members to have informed conversations with families and residents.

88. The Board concluded that strengthening communication approaches, including clearer and timely messaging, improved guidance, use of behavioural insights, and closer collaboration with schools, parents and young people, was essential to increasing uptake of these offers.

Recommendation 3.

The department should develop a communication strategy to promote the benefits and opportunities of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training to parents, carers and schools; articulate how to apply and utilise these offers; and address parent/carers concerns. This should include:

- a) refreshed communications to parents and carers using behavioural insights to ensure families understand the offer and how it can promote independence, which is sent at appropriate times, including at transition;
- b) the use of stories and case studies to promote benefits and address parent/carers concerns;
- c) clear guidance and FAQs on applying for Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training, outlining program flexibility, long term benefits, and addressing common concerns;
- d) identifying opportunities to communicate the availability and benefits of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training to officers and elected Members to ensure they are well informed when engaging with parents, carers, and residents; and
- e) work with schools to promote independent travel early, and embed these aims in Education, Health, and Care Plans.

Engagement

89. The Board considered insights from young people and parents, as well as evidence from other local authorities, that collaboration with key stakeholders on policies and communications was an effective way to secure engagement and achieve successful outcomes.

90. The LGA report notes that parent/carers representatives saw the benefits of building independence and developing life skills in the approach to Home to School Transport but stressed that ‘this must be taken forward in partnership with young people, parents and with schools’.

91. The PCF Chair emphasised the importance of listening to families of children with SEND and understanding challenges and previous experiences. She welcomed involvement of the PCF in developing communications and future policies on Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel.

92. In discussions with the SEND Ambassador Forum, participants had several suggestions to support young people with SEND to travel independently, including on how to prepare for journeys, as well as ways to communicate the offer more effectively and suggested that young people should be included in the development of policies and communications.

Conclusions

93. The Board concluded that it was important to engage with families, young people and schools to increase awareness of the availability and benefits of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training; collaboration could build trust and address concerns but also ensure that policy and communication materials were developed in partnership with those they impact most. The Board recognised that the Council already undertakes meaningful engagement with stakeholders, including parents, carers, schools and young people, and that this work provided a strong foundation for further collaboration.

Recommendation 4.

The department should work with key stakeholders, including the Parent Carer Forum, SEND Strategy Governance Board and SEND Ambassador Forum, to:

- a) co-design Personal Travel Budget and Independent Travel Training communications and policy materials, including resources aimed at parents and carers to build confidence within families on using public transport and supporting their child to travel independently; and**
- b) ensure that young people’s views are shared with relevant stakeholders, including schools, transport providers and elected Members.**

Conclusions

94. The Review Board examined the Council’s current offer of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training as part of its wider travel to school assistance provision. Members concluded that the Council is committed to providing appropriate travel assistance for eligible families and actively promoting initiatives such as Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training, which can offer greater flexibility for families and wider developmental benefits for young people. The Board welcomed this work as part of a range of measures to address rising Home to School Transport costs.

95. Given the clear benefits of Independent Travel Training and the current waiting list, Members considered that there was a strong rationale for exploring the potential expansion of the programme so that more young people can access the skills and long term benefits it provides. However, any consideration must take into account the constraints on available resources and be based on a business case approach.

96. While Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training offer significant benefits, including potential savings for the Council, the Board found that uptake was limited by a number of barriers. Although policies exist to provide flexibility, such as trial periods and part-time arrangements, these options were not widely understood. Many families remained unaware of the full range of support available or how it can be adapted to individual circumstances. The Board therefore concluded that clearer, more

proactive communication was needed to ensure families, schools and partners understand the benefits and practicalities of these offers.

97. The Review Board has considered a wide range of evidence, including hearing directly from young people and parents/carers, which has been central to informing its findings. Members also recognised that elected councillors could play a valuable role in promoting Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training within their communities and supporting informed conversations with families. The Board concluded that ongoing engagement with stakeholders in the development of policies, guidance and communications will be important to ensuring these offers remain accessible, responsive and able to support the needs of families in East Sussex.

Appendix

Scope and terms of reference of the review

Terms of Reference

On the recommendation of the Scoping Board, the People Scrutiny Committee agreed that this review should explore what the Council could do to increase the uptake of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training and that this would be explored through the following **key lines of enquiry**:

1. Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training policies

- How effective are current PTB and ITT policies and do they deliver value for money?
- Are there best practices from other local authorities that could be adopted?

2. Barriers to uptake

- What are the key reasons families decline PTBs or ITT and how can these be addressed?

3. Communication and engagement

- How does the Council currently articulate the availability and benefits of PTBs and ITT to parents, pupils and schools and how effective are those strategies?
- How can elected members, through engagement with their communities, raise awareness of the availability and benefits of PTBs and ITT?

Board Membership and project support

Review Board Members: John Hayling, Parent Governor Representative (Chair), Councillors Colin Belsey, Johannah Howell and Trevor Webb.

The Project Manager was Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser with additional support provided by Louise Carter, Assistant Director (Communication, Planning and Performance) and Megan James, SEND Home to School Transport Service & Project Manager.

Review Board meeting dates

Scoping Board meetings - 8 May 2025 and 29 October 2025

First Review Board meeting - 1 December 2025

Second Review Board meeting - 15 December 2025

Third Review Board meeting - 20 January 2026

Final Review Board meeting - 25 February 2026

Witnesses providing evidence

The Board would like to thank all the witnesses who provided evidence:

ESCC officers

Gillian Laughlin, Team Manager Home to School Transport and Compliance

Jo Miles, Service Manager- Admissions and Transport

Alice Tigwell, SEND CYP Participation Lead

Elaine Weddle, Marketing Communications Account Manager (Children's Services)

External witnesses

Daniel Baker, School, Post-16 and Social Care Transport at Cornwall County Council

Debra Baldwin, Independent Travel Training Programme Leader, National Star

Miriam Binsztok, Transport Coordination Service Manager, Cornwall Council

Ben Gubb, Deputy Head, Lindfield School

Paul Johnson, Services manager for school services, Sheffield City Council

Holly Riley-Saxby East Sussex Parent Carer Forum Chair

SEND Ambassadors

Parents: Karen and Lisa

Evidence papers

Item	Date considered
Home to School Transport: Briefing (2025)	8 May 2025
Home to School Transport Audit Progress update (2025)	29 October 2025
LGA Isos Partnership: <i>The Future of Home to School Transport (2025)</i>	29 October 2025
The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport <i>SEND Transport Toolkit (2023)</i>	29 October 2025
CCN report <i>From Home to the Classroom: Making Travel to School Services Sustainable (2023)</i>	1 December 2025

National Audit Office Report <i>Home to School Transport</i> (2025)	1 December 2025
ESCC communications to parents/carers	15 December 2025
LIFT Independent Travel Training communications	15 December 2025
Parent/carers testimonials	15 December 2025
SEND Ambassador Forum discussion notes	20 January 2026
Cornwall Council IMPOWER presentations	20 January 2026
Cornwall Council communications to parents	20 January 2026

Contact officer: Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
E-mail: rachel.sweeney@eastsussex.gov.uk

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Report to: People Scrutiny

Date of meeting: 12 March 2026

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) update

Purpose: To update the Committee on progress on the SEND action plan, national policy reform, and any local programmes of work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. consider the current position on SEND in East Sussex, including demand pressures, financial challenges and progress in increasing specialist places;
 2. support the continued development of the Local SEND Reform Plan in response to national change requirements; and
 3. note the national policy reform and ongoing programme of work to strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings.
-

1 Background

- 1.1 In line with national trends, East Sussex continues to experience increasing demand for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) support, with Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers rising and a growing complexity of need. Meanwhile, National SEND and schools' reforms require significant changes, including new models of support for SEND and strengthened accountability across the system.
- 1.2 This report provides an update to People Scrutiny Committee on the SEND context in East Sussex, national policy reforms and next steps in East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) response to these changes.

2 Supporting information

- 2.1 The presentation slides at Appendix 1 detail the latest context in relation to SEND, including local pressures and performance; progress on the SEND place planning strategy; an overview of national SEND reforms presented in the Schools White Paper along with their implications for ESCC; and ongoing programmes of work to address these challenges and reforms.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to consider the pressures across the SEND system and the programme of work underway to address sufficiency and prepare for national reforms.

CHIEF OFFICER'S NAME: Carolyn Fair
Chief Officer's Title : Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Elizabeth Funge
Email: Elizabeth.funge@eastsussex.gov.uk

SEND Update

People Scrutiny Committee

12 March 2026

Sarah Speedie, Jessica Stubbings & Katie Ridgway

Heads of Education

Elizabeth Funge

Assistant Director Education



EDUCATION
EAST SUSSEX
TOGETHER FOR EXCELLENCE
AND INCLUSION



What is meant by SEND?

- A child or young person has a Special Education, Need and/or Disability (SEND) where their learning difficulty or disability calls for special educational provision (provision different from or additional to that available to all pupils of the same age).
- The areas of need are:
 - **Communication and interaction**
 - **Cognition and learning**
 - **Social, emotional and mental health difficulties**
 - **Sensory and/or physical needs**
- **SEN Support:** Schools should take action to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place, for those children identified as having SEN. This ‘SEN support’ should be extra targeted school-based support and be part of an Additional Needs Plan, monitored and reviewed by the school.
- **EHCP:** Where, despite the school having taken relevant and purposeful action, the child or young person has not made expected progress, the school or parents should consider requesting an Education, Health and Care needs assessment from the local authority. Some of these needs assessments will result in an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Our Duties

Schools, the LA and Health services have legal duties regarding SEND under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

Identification and Assessment

Local authorities, schools, and health services must identify and assess the special educational needs of children and young people in their area.

This includes conducting and contributing to Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments.

Provision

Provide sufficient support and services to meet the needs identified in EHC plans. This involves collaboration between education, health, and social care services.

Schools must designate a teacher to be responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision (SENCO).

Inclusive Education

Schools must use their best endeavours to make sure that children with SEND get the support they need.

Schools must also ensure that children and young people with SEND engage in activities alongside pupils who do not have SEND.

Monitoring and Review

Regular reviews (at least annually) of EHC plans are required to ensure that the support provided continues to meet the needs of the child or young person.

The LA must consider whether changes are required to the EHC plan, including any changes to outcomes, provision, or educational placement.

Transition Planning

Support must be provided for the transition of young people with SEND from children's to adult services where the child meets the thresholds of the Care Act, ensuring continuity of care and support.

Information and Advice

All partners must provide information, advice, and support to children, young people, and their families regarding SEND. This includes maintaining a local offer that outlines the support available.

Schools must inform parents/carers when they are making SEN provision for their child and must publish a SEN report.

Joint Commissioning

Health services must work collaboratively with local authorities and other agencies to jointly commission services for children and young people with SEND.

Feedback and Improvement

Seek feedback from children, young people, and their families about the SEND services they receive and use this feedback to inform and improve the quality of services.

Safeguarding

Safeguard and promote the welfare of children with SEND.

National Challenges - SEND

Scale and complexity of the SEND Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reorganisation of ICB• Consistency due to the size and complexity of partnership landscape• It takes time for improvements to be felt by families
Sufficiency of provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing sufficient specialist education provision for increasing numbers of children, requiring a special school is a challenge• SEND Capital funding is limited and new provision fills quickly
EHCNA Assessment/ EHCP Timescales	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The timescales for CYP to have assessments as part of the EHCNA process, and the knock-on impact to the time taken to issue an EHCP, is a challenge as the requests for an EHCNA Assessment and in turn numbers of EHCPs increases
Annual Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responding to Annual Reviews in a timely way is a challenge due to the volume of EHCPs• Multi-agency input to Annual Reviews can be a challenge to co-ordinate in a timely way
SEND Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families tell us that diagnostic pathways for ASD/ADHD are not experienced consistently• Waiting times for diagnosis of ASD are longer than NICE guidelines
Appeals to tribunal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appeals to the SEN Tribunal have risen and outcomes are inconsistent• Tribunals often mandate high-cost, specialist provision
Parental confidence and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Issues with capacity, resources and negative national and local press create a challenging environment where parents feel compelled to advocate strongly for their children's needs, sometimes leading to a combative relationship with councils and/or schools.
Resources / High Needs Block Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National shortage of Educational Psychologists and Speech & Language Therapists• Different levels of resource in each partner organisation• Reliance on specific roles for the co-ordination of assessments, reviews and casework• Pressures on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

East Sussex SEND: local context

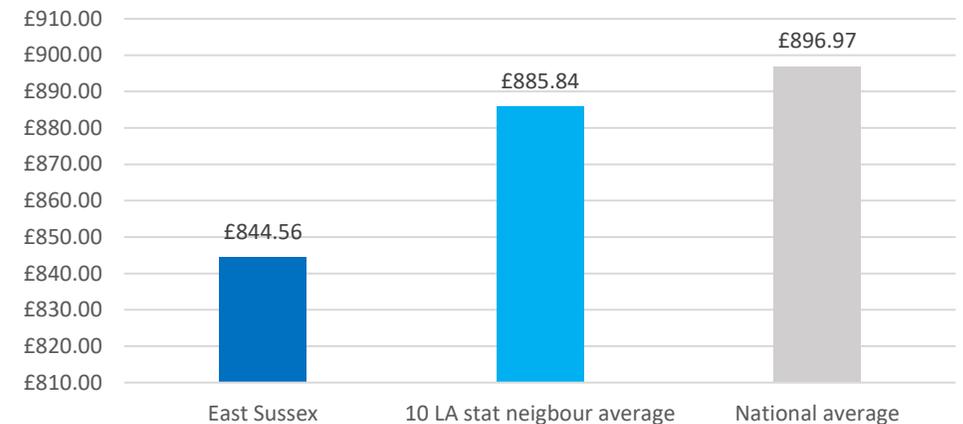
- SEND strategy governance board
[SEND Strategy Governance Board | East Sussex Local Offer](#)
- SEND strategy (extended to end of 2025/26 academic year)
- Area SEND inspection November 2024
 1. **Quality of EHC plans:**
 - Health contribution
 - Annual review process
 2. **Waiting times for:**
 - Neurodevelopmental pathways
 - CAMHS interventions
 - Provision of wheelchairs
 3. **Improve inclusion and increase proportion of CYP with SEND achieving good outcomes**
 4. **Ensure sufficient and suitable:**
 - Alternative Provision
 - Post 16 options
- Post 16 SEND Strategic Planning Group



Financial performance

- High Needs Block continues to be under pressure and we are projecting a deficit
- The number of EHCPs continue to rise and the cost of places has also increased
- ESCC receives comparatively less per-pupil HNB funding
- Mitigations have been put in place but national reform is needed

DSG High Needs Funding per Capita- FY24-25: East Sussex, statistical neighbours and the national average



Financial Year	Projected deficit
2025-26	£23,644,233
2026-27	£54,332,422
2027/28	£90,289,428
2028-29	£133,411,344

Budget Pressures

- Cost of placements at independent and non-maintained special schools
- National reform announced:
[Government ends runaway independent special school fees - GOV.UK](#)
- Education Other Than at School (EOTAS):
 - Increased numbers: currently 229 packages
 - Average cost : £11,330 increase of 13.6%
- Directions from tribunal

Page 95

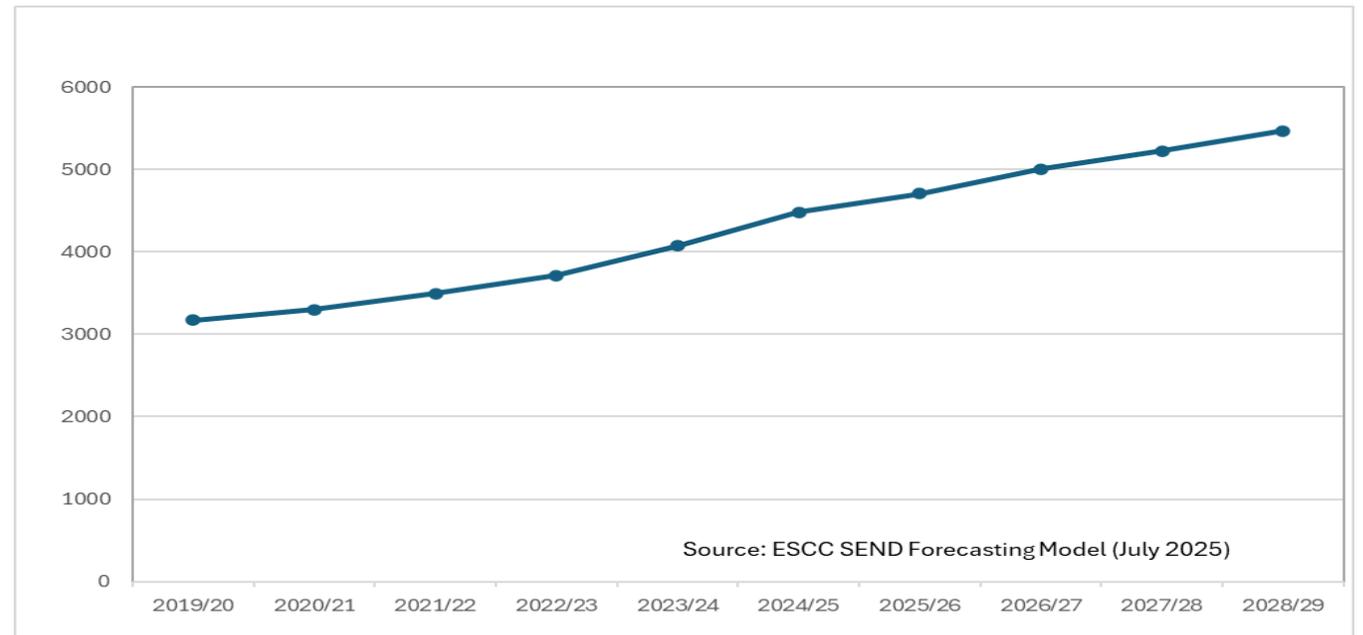


Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers

Numbers of school age children with EHCPs

Page 96

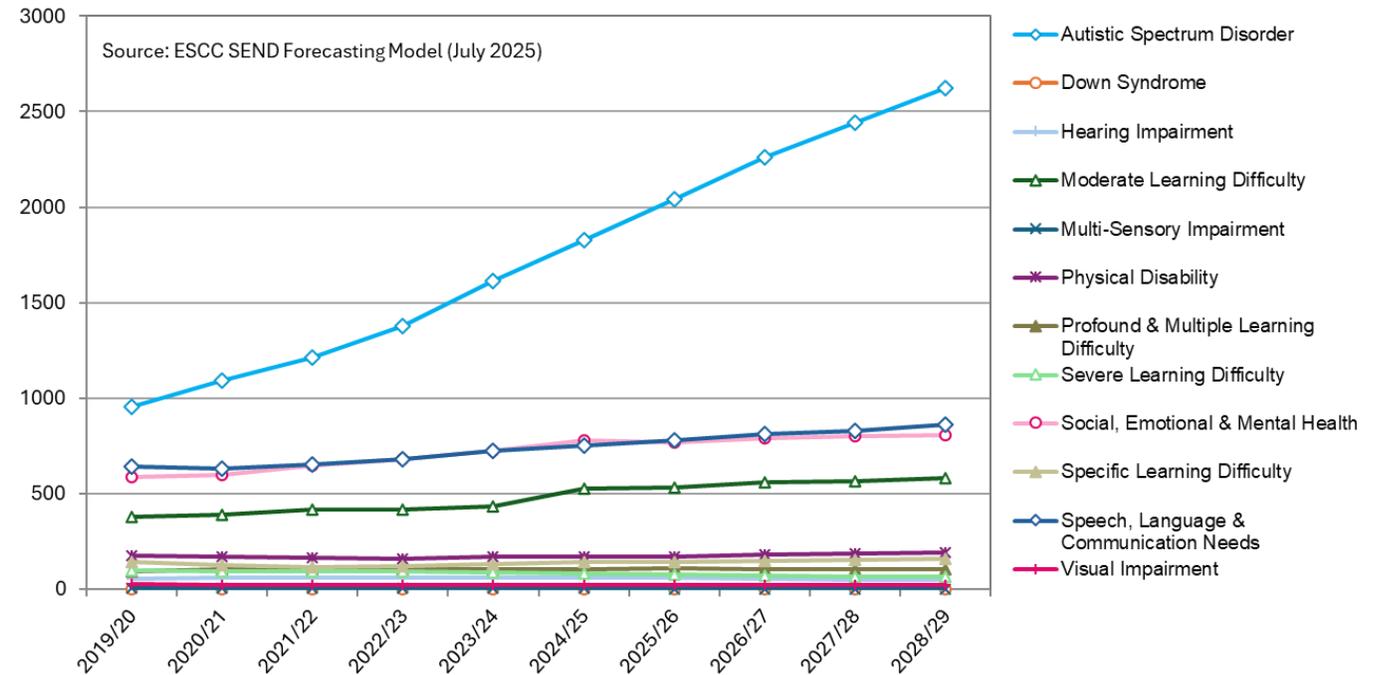
- In 2024/25 there were 4,481 school aged children in East Sussex with an EHCP
- By 2028/29 numbers are forecast to grow to nearly 5,500, a 22% increase



EHCP by primary need group

- Number of children identified as autistic is growing year on year. No sign of this trend reducing
- Post-Covid upturn in plans being issued for speech, language and communication needs and for social, emotional and mental health

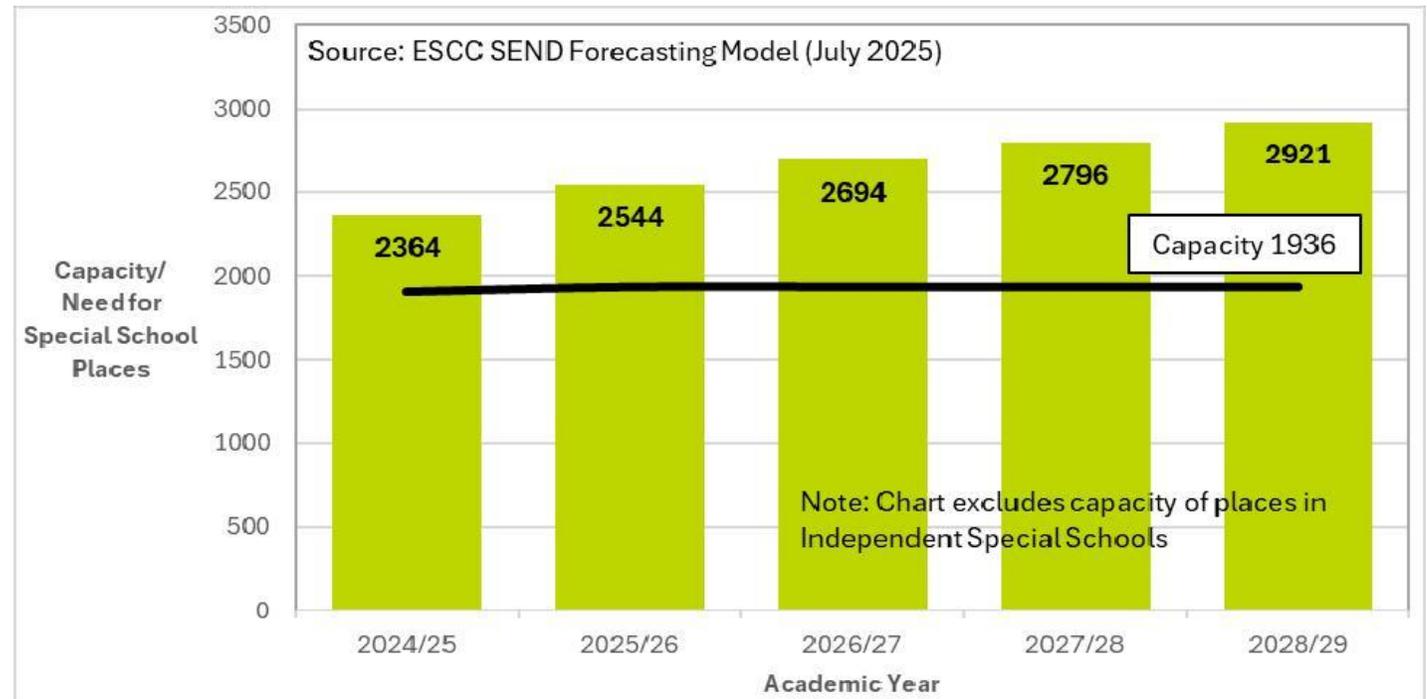
Page 97



Need vs capacity

Page 98

- Capacity across special schools and specialist facilities is currently 1936
- The need for special school and specialist facility places is forecast to increase to 2921 by 2028/29



SEND place planning strategy: completed

287 new special school places have opened:

- The Ropemakers Academy, Hailsham
- The Flagship School, Hastings
- Summerdown School, Eastbourne

Page 99

72 new specialist facility places have opened:

- All Saints CE Primary School, Bexhill
- Churchwood Academy, Hastings
- Denton Community Primary School, Newhaven
- Grovelands Community Primary School, Hailsham
- Meridian Community Primary School, Peacehaven
- Priory School, Lewes
- Robertsbridge Community College



SEND place planning strategy: current developments

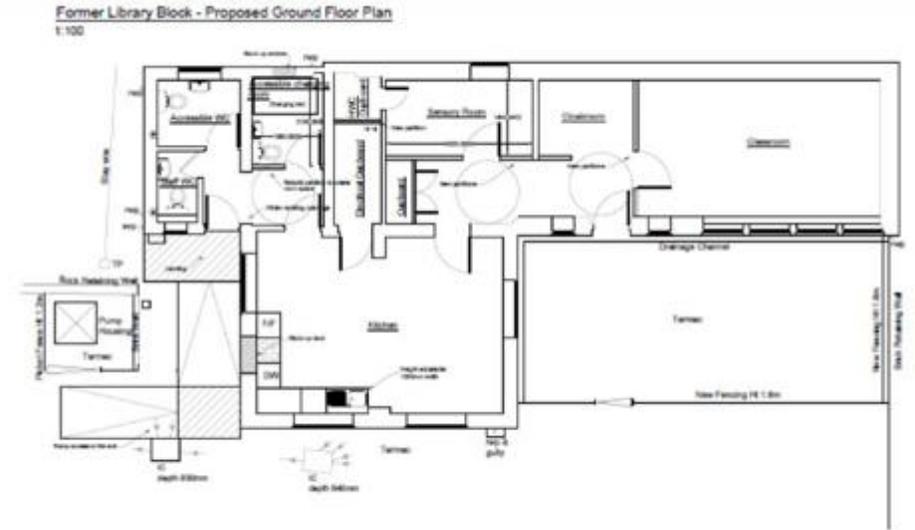
- Acre Wood Academy: reorganisation & expansion, to complete late 2026
- New specialist facilities for ASD pupils:
 - Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School
 - Ocklynge Junior School
 - Chyngton School
 - Seaford Head School
- Expansion of specialist facilities at:
 - Uckfield College
 - Heathfield Community College

Page 100



SEND place planning strategy: future developments

- Continued increase of specialist facility places:
 - Expressions of interest received from another four schools
 - Further expressions of interest invited
 - Align with SEND reforms and policy for more specialist places in mainstream schools



- Partnership with Southfield Trust and SWALE Trust to create a satellite class at a primary school in Eastbourne
- Development of specialist provision for post-16 learners through expansion of special school provision for 16-19 year olds and working with FE Colleges to develop SEND support bases

Outcomes : Key Stage 2 (KS2)

Reading, Writing, and Mathematics combined

Page 102

Working at the expected
standard % (EXS)

60.6%

Up from 58.0% in 2024
2.0% below nat av of 62.6%

Working at the expected
standard % (EXS) –
Disadvantaged pupils

44.3%

Up from 40.8% in 2024
3.4% below nat av of 47.7%

Working at the expected
standard % (EXS) – SEN
Support pupils

27.4%

Up from 23.1% in 2024
1.4% below nat av of 28.8%

Working at the expected
standard % (EXS) - EHCP
pupils

5.7%

Up from 3.6% in 2024
3.5% below nat av of 9.2%

Working at higher standard

6.0%

Up from 5.0% in 2024
2.5% below nat av of 8.5%

Working at the higher
standard – Disadvantaged
pupils

2.4%

Up from 1.4% in 2024
1.2% below nat av of 3.6%

Working at the higher
standard– SEN Support
pupils

0.9%

Down from 1.5% in 2024
1.1% below nat av of 2.0%

Working at the higher
standard – EHCP pupils

0.4%

Up from 0.0% in 2024
0.3% below nat av of 0.7%

Secondary: SEND Outcomes by Area Group

2025	Attainment 8		English & Maths 9-5		English and Maths 9-4	
	SEN Support	EHCP	SEN Support	EHCP	SEN Support	EHCP
National	33.7	14.8	22.3%	7.5%	38.5%	13.9%
East Sussex	28.9	12.1	16.4%	6.3%	32.7%	8.8%
Area Group 1 <i>Lewes, Wealden and Coastal</i>	30.1	22.1	19.8%	17.1%	38.2%	19.5%
Area Group 2 <i>Eastbourne and Hailsham</i>	29.6	22.8	18.0%	22.9%	31.1%	22.9%
Area Group 3 <i>Rother, Rye and Hastings</i>	27.2	18.3	12.3%	4.3%	28.8%	12.8%

East Sussex SEND: performance

Primary: Attendance and Exclusions

Page 104

Current National DfE Attendance Rate for Primary ACY24-25

94.80%

Current National DfE Persistent Absence Rate for Primary ACY24-25

13.50%

All Primary Schools	ESCC Primary ACY24-25 September to July		
	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
All Pupils	94.37% ↑	13.81% ↓	1.24% ↑
EHCP	86.24% ↑	35.99% ↓	8.65% ↓
SEN Support	92.25% ↑	22.21% ↓	1.75% ↑
FSM Ever6	91.36% ↓	27.90% ↓	2.50% ↑

Latest National DfE Attendance Rate for Primary

94.80%

Latest National DfE Persistent Absence Rate for Primary

14.29%

All Primary Schools	ESCC Primary ACY25-26 September to December		
	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
All Pupils	94.37% ↓	15.59% ↑	1.57% ↑
EHCP	83.98% ↓	39.88% ↑	12.67% ↑
SEN Support	91.67% ↓	25.11% ↑	2.59% ↑
FSM Ever6	90.86% ↓	30.48% ↑	3.24% ↑

Current National DfE Suspension Rate for Primary ACY24-25

0.83

Current National DfE PEX Rate for Primary ACY24-25

0.01

All Primary Schools	ESCC ACY24-25 September to July	
	Suspension	Permanent Exclusion
All Pupils	1.18% ↓	0.06% ↓
EHCP	10.26% ↓	0.66% ↓
SEN Support	3.56% ↓	0.13% ↑
FSM Ever6	2.73% ↑	0.15% ↑

Latest National DfE Suspension Rate for Primary

0.99

Latest National DfE PEX Rate for Primary

0.03%

All Primary Schools	ESCC ACY25-26 September to December	
	Suspension	Permanent Exclusion Rate%
All Pupils	0.52% ↓	0.02% ↓
EHCP	2.08% ↓	0.10% ↓
SEN Support	2.14% ↓	0.08% ↓
FSM Ever6	1.12% ↑	0.05% ↓

Secondary: Attendance and Exclusions

Current National DfE Attendance Rate for Secondary ACY24-25

91.40%

Current National DfE Persistent Absence Rate for Secondary ACY24-

24.30

Latest National DfE Attendance Rate for Secondary

92.00%

Latest National DfE Persistent Absence Rate for Secondary

21.09

All Secondary Schools	ESCC ACY24-25 September to July		
	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
All Pupils	89.53% ↑	30.77% ↑	5.27% ↓
EHCP	77.64% ↓	48.19% ↑	22.56% ↑
SEN Support	84.06% ↑	42.36% ↑	9.54% ↓
FSM Ever6	83.00% ↑	49.79% ↑	11.40% ↑

All Secondary Schools	ESCC ACY25-26 September to December		
	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
All Pupils	91.29% ↑	23.95% ↓	3.92% ↓
EHCP	81.34% ↑	41.60% ↓	15.70% ↓
SEN Support	85.49% ↓	37.53% ↑	8.03% ↓
FSM Ever6	85.56% ↑	40.28% ↓	8.30% ↓

Current National DfE Suspension Rate

8.19%

Current National DfE PEX Rate for

0.10%

Current National DfE Suspension Rate for Secondary ACY24-25

7.83%

Current National DfE PEX Rate for Secondary ACY24-25

0.25%

All Secondary Schools	ESCC ACY24-25 September to July	
	Suspension Rate%ACY24-25	Permanent Exclusion Rate% ACY24-25
All Pupils	10.46% ↓	0.25% ↓
EHCP	15.59% ↓	0.00% ↓
SEN Support	20.93% ↓	0.27% ↓
FSM Ever6	23.59% ↑	0.79% ↑

All Secondary Schools	ESCC ACY25-26 September to December	
	Suspension Rate%ACY25-26	Permanent Exclusion Rate% ACY25-26
All Pupils	4.70% ↓	0.04% ↓
EHCP	8.01% ↓	0.00% ↓
SEN Support	12.13% ↓	0.12% ↓
FSM Ever6	10.11% ↓	0.10% ↓

Special Schools: Attendance and Exclusions

Current National DfE Attendance Rate for Special School ACY24-25 >>> **87.10%**

Current National DfE Persistent Absence Rate for Special schl ACY24-25 >>> **35.80%**

Latest National DfE Attendance Rate for Special School >>> **87.10%**

Latest National DfE Persistent Absence Rate for Special school >>> **34.90%**

Page 106

Special Schools	Latest National DfE Primary Rates %		ESCC ACY24-25 September to July		
	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
All Pupils	87.10%	35.80%	83.50% ↓	40.47% ↑	10.98% ↑
EHCP	84.20%	36.56%	83.94% ↓	39.52% ↓	9.74% ↓
SEN Support	90.50%	63.15%	82.93% ↑		
FSM Ever6	81.00%	43.43%	80.27% ↓	47.03% ↓	13.97% ↑

Special Schools	Latest National DfE Rates %		ESCC ACY25-26 September to December		
	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Overall Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
All Pupils	87.10%	34.90%	85.00% ↑	40.11% ↑	9.02% ↓
EHCP	87.64%	34.51%	85.21% ↑	39.73% ↑	8.48% ↓
SEN Support	67.38%	66.52%	0.00% ↓	#	#
FSM Ever6	85.63%	40.29%	81.73% ↑	48.21% ↓	12.12% ↓

Current National DfE Suspension Rate for Special School ACY24-25 >>> **5.22**

Current National DfE PEX Rate for Special School ACY24-25 >>> **0.03**

Latest National DfE Suspension Rate for Special School >>> **5.06%**

Latest National DfE PEX Rate for Special School >>> **0.08**

Special School	Latest National DfE Primary Rates %		ESCC ACY24-25 September to July	
	Suspensions Rate	Permanent Exclusions	Suspension Rate%ACY24-25	Permanent Exclusion Rate% ACY24-25
All Pupils	5.22%	0.03%	11.46% ↓	0.07% ↑
EHCP	5.01%	0.07%	8.78% ↓	0.07% ↑
SEN Support	9.31%	0.09%	0.00% ↓	0.00% ↓
FSM Ever6	7.23%	0.07%	17.38% ↑	0.15% ↑

Special School	Latest National DfE Rates %		ESCC ACY25-26 September to December	
	Suspensions Rate	Permanent Exclusions	Suspension Rate%ACY25-26	Permanent Exclusion Rate% ACY25-26
All Pupils	5.06%	0.08%	5.14% ↓	0.00% ↓
EHCP	5.01%	0.08%	5.05% ↓	0.00% ↓
SEN Support	9.32%	0.09%	#	#
FSM Ever6	7.24%	0.08%	6.75% ↑	0.00% ↓

Schools White Paper: Every Child Achieving & Thriving

It aims to ensure that every child achieves high standards and thrives in school, with a strong focus on inclusion, excellence, and reducing inequalities. It aligns with proposed reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system.

[Read the White Paper](#)

The paper is focused around five key areas:

- High standards for every child, regardless of background
- Stronger inclusion within mainstream education
- Closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers
- Early intervention and targeted support
- Accountability and transparency across the school system



Department
for Education

Every Child Achieving and Thriving

SEND Reform: Putting Children & Young People First

It aims to transform how support is identified, provided, and funded, with a focus on early intervention, inclusion, and fairness. The government is seeking feedback before finalising legislation and policy changes.

[Read the SEND Reform consultation paper](#)

Its core principles include:

- Putting children and young people first, ensuring their education and wellbeing are central
- Strengthening inclusion in mainstream education where appropriate
- Providing early and timely support to prevent needs escalating
- Ensuring evidence-based and fair support applied consistently
- Improving collaboration between education, health, care services, and families



HM Government

SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First

Government Consultation

Key changes to SEND support

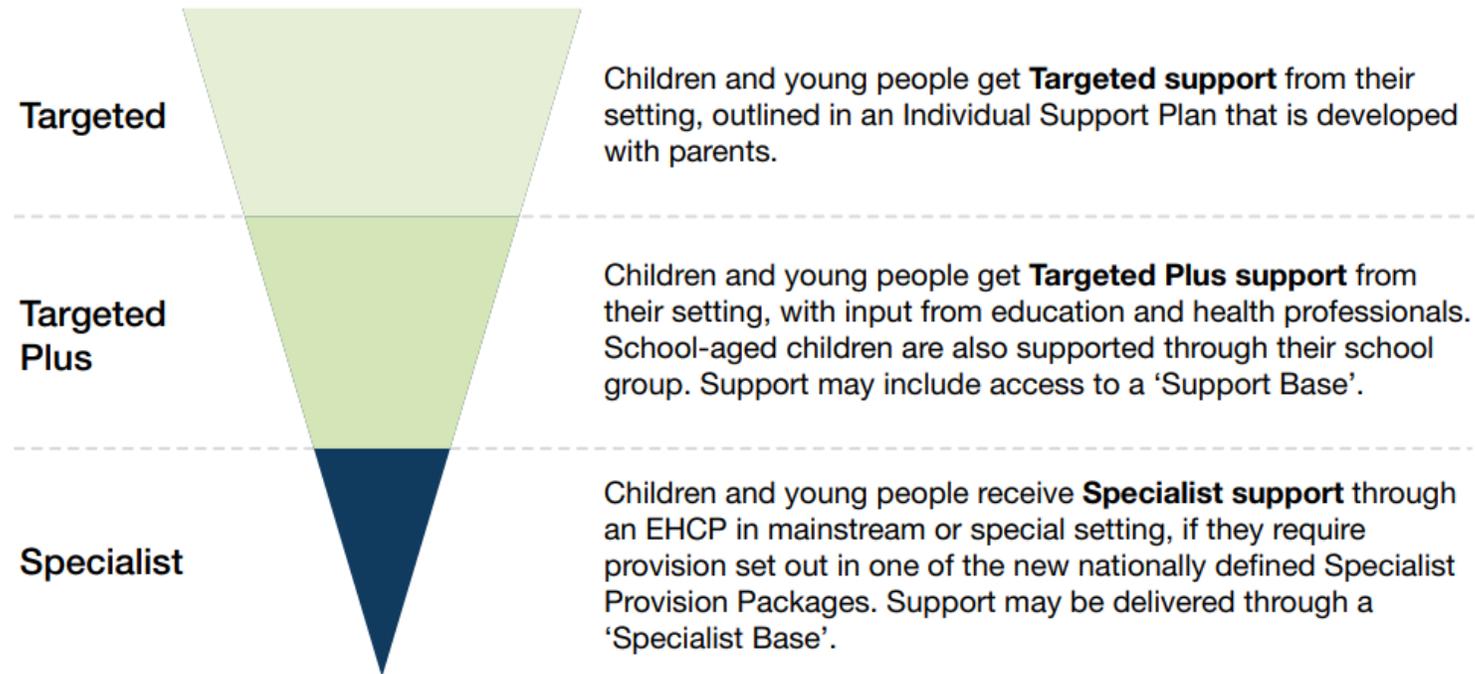
- The new system will start with a universal offer of high quality teaching and support for all children – commonly occurring met in mainstream
- Three new layers of support – Targeted, Targeted Plus, and Specialist
- Individual support plans (ISPs) will outline day to day educational provision
- Schools to be supported by new ‘experts at hand’ service which will improve access to education & health professionals
- Inclusion bases will be expanded: support bases & specialist bases
- Nationally designed Specialist Provision Packages (SPPs) will guide eligibility for EHCPs and provision available to meet needs
- Where required, EHCPs will set out statutory entitlement as per SPPs, supported by ISP describing day to day provision

Page 109



Layers of Support

Figure 6: Layers of support



Oversight & Accountability

- Existing statutory code of practice will be updated
- Schools will have:
 - new duty to produce an annual inclusion strategy
 - direct responsibility for an inclusive mainstream fund
 - Requirement to ensure all staff receive training on SEND
- Via local groupings, schools to pool minimum level of funding to support less common needs fairly across the grouping
- Improved schools' complaints process & mediation offer
- Tribunals will remain but as a 'last resort' and will not be able to name a placement for a child
- Oversight and scrutiny of implementation of reforms via Children's Commissioner

Page 111



Opportunities & Risks

Opportunities	Risks
Improved outcomes for children & young people	Increased demand for EHCPs during transition
Improved inclusion & earlier support	Financial pressure & implementation complexity
System redesign & financial sustainability	Capacity challenges: LA & ICB
Clearer strategic role for LA	Burden on schools
Greater multi-agency collaboration	Specialist Provision Packages
Workforce development & capacity building	Stakeholder relationship risks

SEND Reform: Implementation



Local SEND Reform Plan

- In the new year, following publication of the schools white paper, we will ask every local area to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan, setting out how they will move to a new special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system built on the 5 principles set out by the Secretary of State: early, local, fair, effective and shared.
- We will also ask, as part of the Local SEND Reform Plan, for more regular data submissions, focused on the key indicators of improvement. These will form a vital foundation for implementing SEND reforms in a way that reflects the unique contexts of local areas and is underpinned by data and evidence. Full details of expectations of these plans will be published alongside the schools white paper.

Page 114



‘We want all schools to be inclusive by design, so children in every corner of the country can have their needs met in their community’

Joint letter from DfE/NHSE Dec 2025

Change programme: preparation for reform



Refine policy and inform how it could be rolled-out



Bring together evidence and examples of more inclusive systems



Provide actionable insight about the change journey locally



Build capacity for sector-led learning for future phases of reform

A whole system reform delivered in phases

Role of the Change Programme:

The Change Programme is the 'design and test' element of national reform towards inclusive and sustainable systems.

Understanding how to design national changes to fit different local areas and the support required to move to more consistent provision nationally.

32

Local Authorities

in

9

Change Programme Partnerships



Extend testing of inclusion support (2025/26)

Bringing together the **national and local testing** of support for more inclusive systems via the Change Programme



First phase of reform roll-out (2026-28)

Using the early insight on implementation of change to **inform and enable adoption** more broadly alongside other system change



Embed (2028+)

Delivering **further phases of reform**, shaped by the progress and **maturity of change** in the earlier phases

Universally Available Provision

1. Leadership including culture and ethos

- Aspirations, values, promoting inclusion and inclusive practice
- Collaboration, co-production and communication

2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- Curriculum Content
- High Quality inclusive Teaching
- Assessment and Progress

3. Belonging, Relationships and Wellbeing

- MHEW
- Therapeutic approaches
- Behaviour – policies, reasonable adjustments
- Effective transitions starting school, between phases and between lessons/activities/home-school

4. Removing Barriers and Meeting Needs

A. Environment

- Learning Environment
- Communication environment
- Resources and Equipment

B. Physical/Sensory Including medical needs

- Environments including lighting, furniture, sound, visual
- Meeting medical needs

5. Involving pupils, parents / carers and families and the wider community

- Collaboration, co-production and communication
- Community Participation
- Links with ESCC

Bringing together support & services for inclusion

Our nine Change Programme Partnerships will work together across local areas to test how they can strengthen inclusion across their education settings through a Local Inclusion Support Offer. Within this there are specific areas that DfE are funding local areas to develop consistently.

Local Inclusion Support Offer prototyping

Local areas will create an inclusion support offer that creates or strengthens provision to bridge the gap between mainstream settings and specialist placements and services. Initially available to Early Years and Mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools, could also include Further Education settings. This service will improve whole-setting approaches. Settings will be equipped to provide a more inclusive and accessible offer, and CYP will have swifter access to specialist interventions where required.

Page 118

Use of Alternative Provision

This includes:

- Remodelling the use of Alternative Provision into a **3-tier model** of targeted interventions and ensuring **quality & value for money** of AP
- Testing the **Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce** approach to multi-disciplinary support to schools.

Specialist capacity within mainstream

This includes:

- Pilot sites for **Early Language Support for Every Child** to access universal & targeted speech & language support in EY and Primary
- Pilot sites for **Programme for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools** improving awareness & support

Extending mainstream practice & provision

This includes:

- LAs working with schools to expand the use of **Assistive Technologies**
- More coordinated local approaches to expanding **effective models for SEN Units or Resourced Provision**

LISO Pilot: Phase 1

Pilot schools have selected small number of young people within their current cohorts with identified SEN where:

- Schools feel that they have done or are close to doing all that they can to support
- Current offer not meeting needs

Page 119

Pilot Schools

Group 1	Group 2
Heathfield Community School	Uckfield College
Cross in Hand	Manor Primary
Maynards Green	<u>Buxted CofE</u>
<u>Punnetts Town</u>	Bonnors



East Sussex: Excellence for All

The local authority is the champion for children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable. In education, we work in partnership with schools, colleges, and settings across the system to achieve the best outcomes for all pupils in East Sussex. Education plays a vital role in the lives of children and young people and providers are at the heart of their communities.

A collective vision

Our vision for the education system in East Sussex is that by 2030 all children and young people in East Sussex will be a part of an excellent, inclusive, and equitable education system. This system will foster a meaningful sense of belonging from Early Years all the way to post-16 provision.

Our partnerships across education remain one of our core strengths. This vision will bring further cohesion to that infrastructure and will strengthen further our multi-agency partnership working across education, health, care, and economy. This is particularly important to fulfilling our set of responsibilities relating to vulnerable children and young people, including those with SEND. Our work across children's services and with our wider partners will enable families and communities to build greater independence and resilience, to support our children and young people to be successful.

SEND Strategy – Draft Structure

SEND Strategy, 2026 - 2030

- High level vision document – setting out our ambition for children and young people with SEND in East Sussex and how we will work in partnership to achieve this
 - Vision statement
 - Overview of our partnership structure
 - For each theme: a summary of what the data tells us, why this is a priority, what the key areas of focus will be, what will impact look like

Local SEND Reform Plan

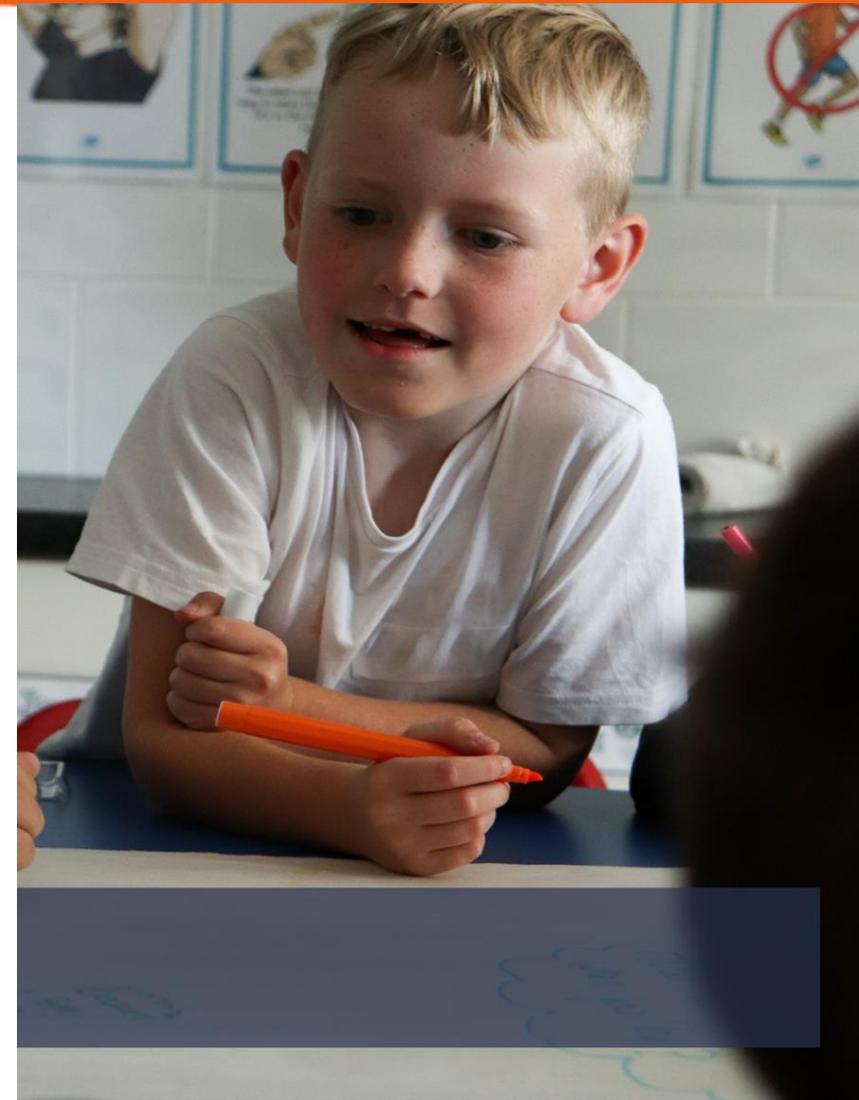
- A separate more dynamic document that will be the action plan that sets out how the strategy will be delivered and includes our ASEND Improvement actions
- **AP Strategic Plan** – already in place and linked document



Timeline

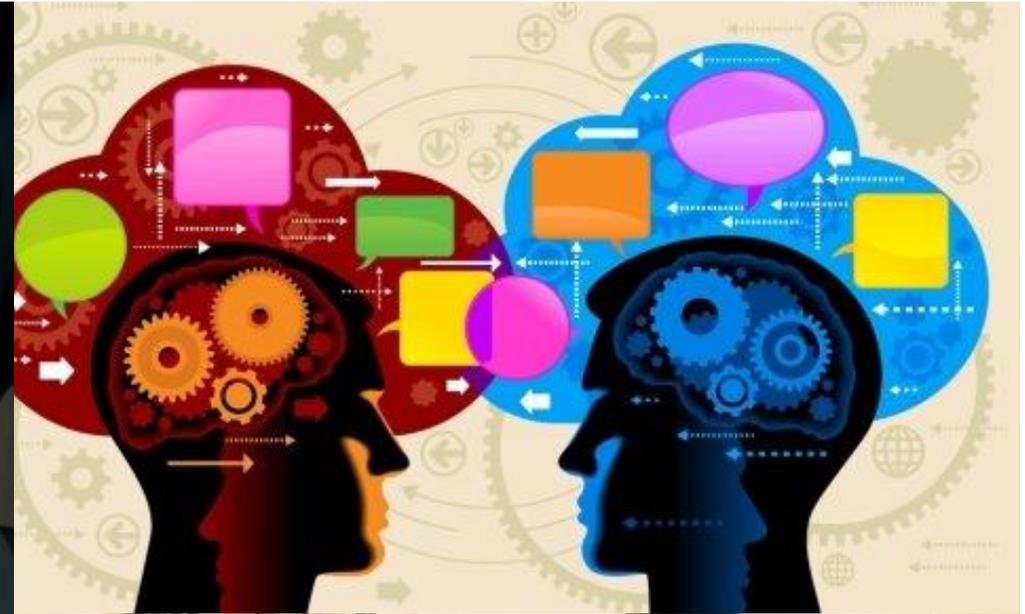
Page 122

Key Milestones	Date
Joint Board	3 June
Internal sign off: ESCPF & ICB	tbc
SEND Strategy Governance Board	22 June
Lead Member Approval	13 July
Publish new strategy	1 September 2026



Any Questions?

Page 123



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Report to: People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting: 12 March 2026
By: Director of Children's Services
Title: East Sussex Education Attainment and Performance 2025
Purpose: To inform the People Scrutiny Committee of the attainment results for academic year 2024/25

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the attainment results for academic year 2024/25

1 Background

1.1 This report provides an overview of the attainment results for academic year 2024/25 for early years, primary and secondary pupils. The data in these reports, comes from the published Department for Education (DfE) reports or Nexus Insight reports, depending on availability. The DfE reports are publicly available data sets and are the data sets used to produce the statistical neighbours' reports.

1.2 The data in the report shows the latest data available from the DfE. The provisional and revised national data is set out in Appendix 1. Please note the following in relation to the data:

- Key Stage 4 data from the DfE is provisional and will be revised by the DfE in early 2026. Provisional and revised national data where available is set out in Appendix 1.

1.3 There is no Key Stage 1 data for academic year 2024/25. This follows the DfE announcement that, from academic year 2023 to 2024 onwards, end of Key Stage 1 assessment is now non-statutory.

1.4 The local authority has a statutory duty to promote high standards of education. This duty is discharged within the context of the removal of the DfE grant for school improvement and the expectation that schools themselves should lead improvement. In East Sussex, we deliver this duty through working collaboratively with all schools through our partnership structures and supporting a school led system of improvement. The local authority only has powers of intervention for maintained schools and, where we intervene, we have impact and outcomes improve. We have no formal powers of intervention in academy schools; 74% of secondary schools, 39% of primary schools, 100% of all-through schools and 100% of special schools are academies.

2 Supporting information

2.1 **Headlines:** For all pupils overall, performance at Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) remains above the national average. Performance in Year 1 Phonics, Key Stage 2, and Key Stage 4 are all below the national averages. However, Key Stage 4 provisional data

at school level indicates that there has been an improvement in attainment results across secondary schools in Hastings, albeit from a low starting point. This has reduced in county variability, however, where schools do not perform as well, this has a significant impact on the overall average for East Sussex.

2.2 Foundation Stage: The percentage of children achieving a good level of development in East Sussex in 2025 is 70.3% compared to the national figure of 68.3%. The percentage point gap between children receiving free school meals achieving a good level of development and their peers is 22.5%. The national average gap for this cohort for 2025 is 21.3%.

2.3 Phonics: In 2025, 78.0% of pupils in East Sussex were working at the required level in phonics at the end of Year 1, compared to the national average of 79.8%. In 2025 63.7% of disadvantaged pupils in East Sussex were working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 1. The 2025 national average for this cohort is 66.6%.

2.4 Key Stage 2

Reading/Writing/Maths (R/W/M) Combined: In 2025, 60.6% of pupils in East Sussex achieved the expected standard in R/W/M combined, compared with the national average of 62.6%. This is an increase from the previous year and continues an upward trend since 2022. 6.0% of pupils were working at higher standard in R/W/M combined in 2025 compared to the national average of 8.5%. 44.3% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in R/W/M combined, compared to the national average of 47.7%. 2.4% of disadvantaged pupils were working at higher standard in R/W/M combined compared to the national average of 3.6%.

Reading: In 2025, 74.4% of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, compared with the national average of 75.8%. 30.9% of pupils were working at higher standard in reading in 2025 compared with the national average of 33.8%. 62.4% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in reading compared to the national average of 63.8%. 19.3% of disadvantaged pupils were working at higher standard in reading in 2025, compared to the national average of 21.5%.

Writing: In 2025, 72.4% of pupils achieved the expected standard in writing, compared with the national average of 72.6%. 10.5% of pupils were working at higher standard in writing in 2025 compared with the national average of 12.9%. 57.5% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in writing in 2025 compared to the national average of 59.5%. 5.3% of disadvantaged pupils were working at higher standard in writing in 2025 compared to the national average of 6.6%.

Maths: In 2025, 71.2% of pupils achieved the expected standard in maths, compared with the national average of 74.6%. 21.3% of pupils were working at higher standard in maths in 2025 compared with the national average of 26.6%. 57.4% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in maths in 2025 compared to the national average of 60.9%. 11.8% of disadvantaged pupils were working at higher standard in maths in 2025 compared to the national average of 15.2%.

English Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (EGPS): In 2025, 66.3% of pupils achieved the expected standard in EGPS compared with the national average of 73.2%. 19.5% of

pupils were working at higher standard in EGPS in 2025, compared with the national average of 29.9%. 51.2% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in EGPS in 2025. 10.2% of disadvantaged pupils were working at higher standard in EGPS in 2025. The 2025 national averages for this cohort are expected standard 60.2%, higher standard 18.8%.

There are no Key Stage 2 progress scores available for academic year 2024/25.

2.5 Key Stage 4

- The provisional Attainment 8 score for East Sussex in 2025 is 43.0 compared to the provisional national score of 45.9. The provisional attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils is 30.3 compared to the provisional national score of 34.9.
- Attainment 8 for all pupils is in the 79th percentile, down 1 place from the last academic year.
- 62.9% of East Sussex pupils achieved grades 9-4 in English and maths in 2025. 41.5% of East Sussex pupils achieved grades 9-5 in English and Maths in 2025.
- 37.9% of disadvantaged pupils achieved grades 9-4 in English and Maths, and 20.2% of disadvantaged pupils achieved grades 9-5 in 2025.
- 23.2% of pupils achieved grades 9-4 in all EBacc subjects. 16.2% of pupils achieved grades 9-5 in all EBacc subjects.
- 10.0% of disadvantaged pupils achieved grades 9-4 in all EBacc subjects. 6.6% of disadvantaged pupils achieved grades 9-5 in all EBacc subjects.
- Progress 8 scores will not be produced for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years due to the disruption of Key Stage 2 SATs during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means there is no prior attainment data to calculate the measure.
- Performance varies significantly between schools. Performance has improved at the three schools in Hastings, and at the Eastbourne Academy, however it remains below the national average. This contrasts with schools in the Wealden/Lewes area where the average of these schools is above the national average.

2.6 Key Stage 5

The local authority does not collect or report on KS5 attainment data. The DfE published performance data for 16-18 providers in February 2026 and this has been included in the slides in Appendix 1.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Committee is asked to consider the attainment results for summer 2025. Analysis of these results informs strategic and operational decisions about the priorities for improvement, and support to schools, including for the remainder of the 2025/26 academic year.

CAROLYN FAIR
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Elizabeth Funge, Assistant Director Education

Tel. No: 07769 164189

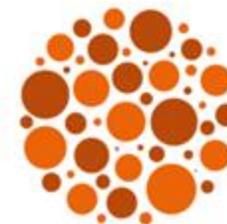
Email: elizabeth.funge@eastsussex.gov.uk

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Appendix 1: Attainment Report 2025

2025 Attainment Report

Appendix 1



EDUCATION
EAST SUSSEX
TOGETHER FOR EXCELLENCE
AND INCLUSION



Notes

- The data in these reports, comes from the published DfE reports or Nexus Insight reports, depending on availability . The DfE reports are publicly available data sets and are the data sets used to produce the statistical neighbours' reports.
- There is no KS1 data for academic year 2024/25. From academic year 2023/24 onwards, KS1 assessment is now non-statutory.

Outcomes : Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Good level of development % - all pupils

70.3%

Up from 69.0% in 2024
2.0% above nat av of 68.3%

Good level of development % - FSM

50.1%

Down from 50.2% in 2024
1.2% below nat av of 51.3

Good level of development % SEN Support

28.1%

Up from 26.8% in 2024
1.7% above nat av of 26.4%

Good level of development % EHCP

3.6%

Up from 1.6% in 2024
0.4% below nat av of 4.0%

Average Number of Early Learning Goals at expected level per child - all pupils

14.4

The same as in 2024
0.3 above nat av of 14.1

Average Number of Early Learning Goals at expected level per child - FSM

12.3

Down from 12.7 in 2024
0.1 above nat av of 12.2

Average Number of Early Learning Goals at expected level per child SEN Support

9.3

Up from 9.0 in 2024
0.6 above nat av of 8.7

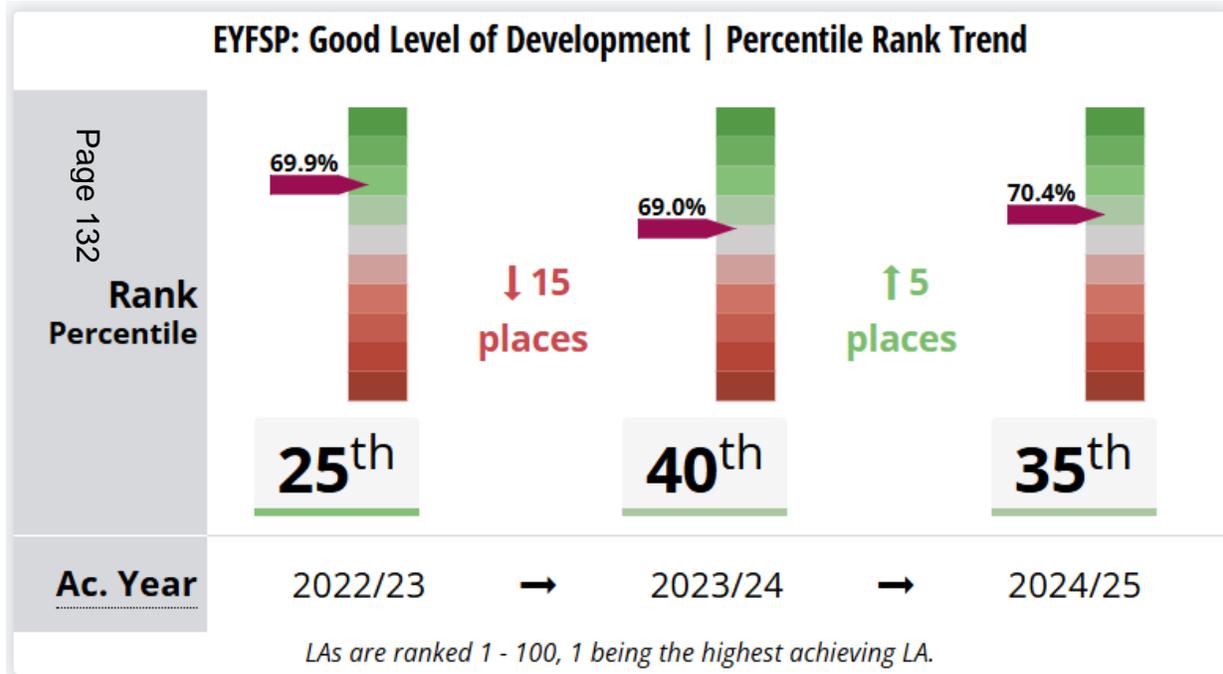
Average Number of Early Learning Goals at expected level per child EHCP

1.7

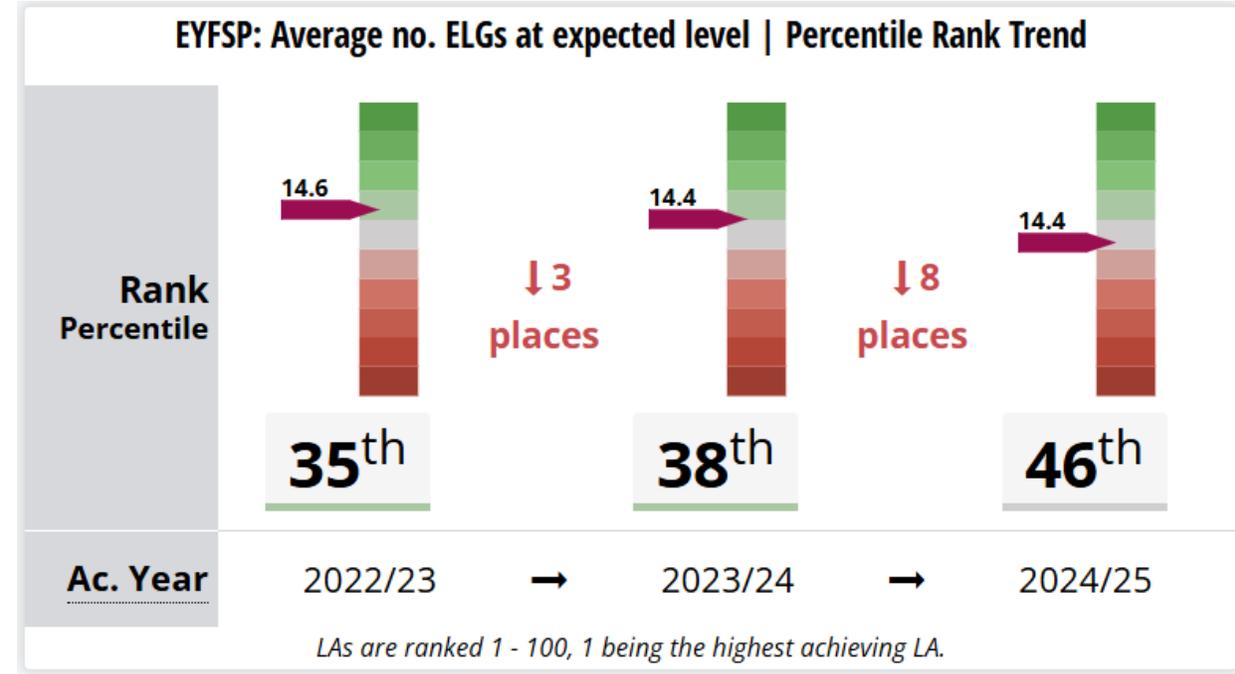
Up from 0.9 in 2024
0.6 below nat av of 2.3

Outcomes : Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

EYFSP: Good Level of Development | Percentile Rank Trend



EYFSP: Average no. ELGs at expected level | Percentile Rank Trend



Outcomes : Year 1 Phonics

Met the required standard %

78.0%

Down from 78.5% in 2024
1.8% below nat av of 79.8%

Met the required standard %
- SEN Support pupils

46.1%

Up from 42.2% in 2024
6.0% below nat av of 52.1%

Met the required standard % -
Disadvantaged pupils

63.7%

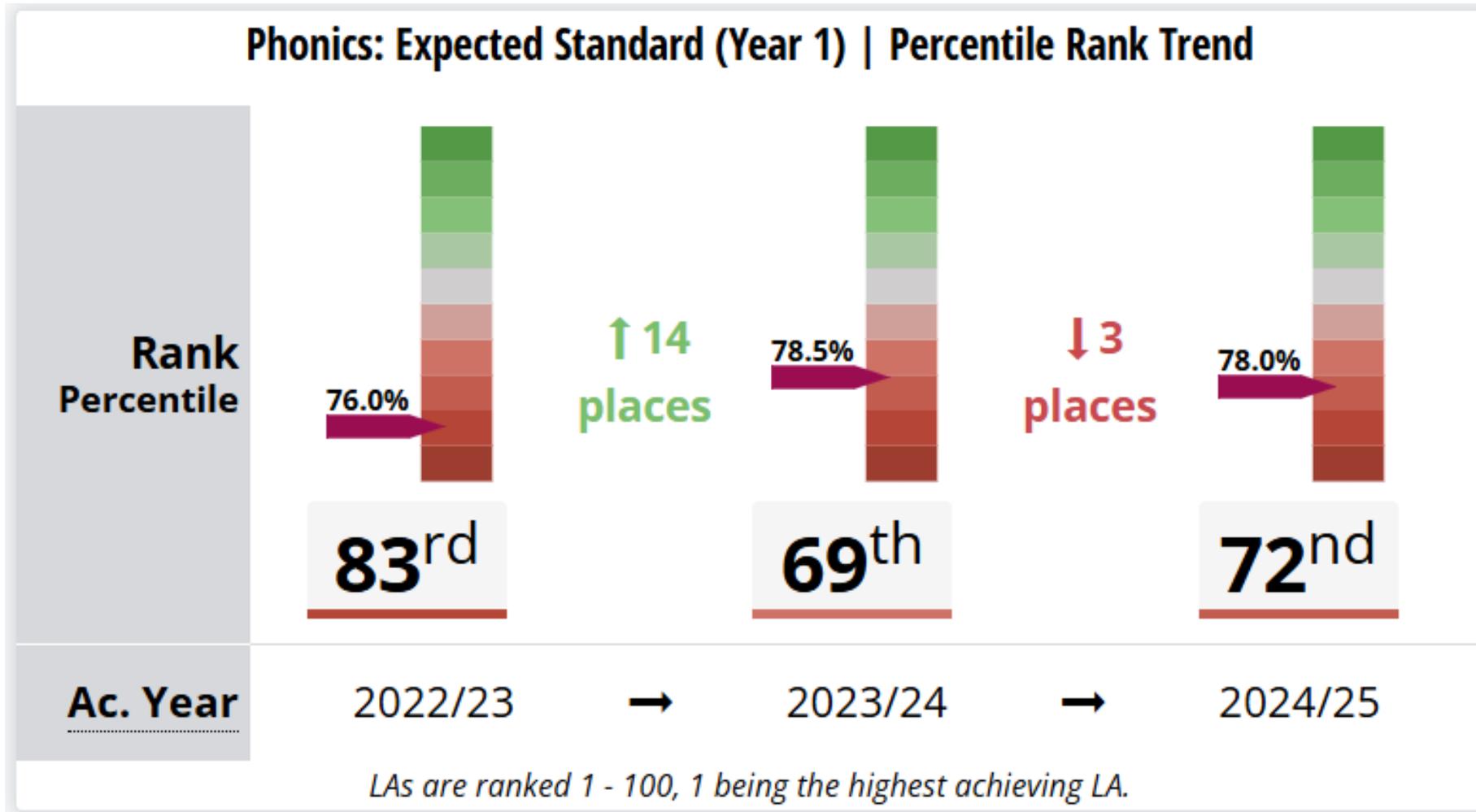
Up from 62.5% in 2024
2.9% below nat av of 66.6%

Met the required standard %
- EHCP pupils

11.7%

Up from 4.7% in 2024
8.0% below nat av of 19.7%

Outcomes : Year 1 Phonics



Outcomes : Key Stage 2 (KS2) - Reading, Writing, and Mathematics combined

Page 135

Working at the expected standard % (EXS)

60.6%

Up from 58.0% in 2024
1.0% below nat av of 62.6%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - Disadvantaged pupils

44.3%

Up from 40.8% in 2024
3.4% below nat av of 47.7%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - SEN Support pupils

27.4%

Up from 23.1% in 2024
1.4% below nat av of 28.8%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - EHCP pupils

5.7%

Up from 3.6% in 2024
3.5% below nat av of 9.2%

Working at higher standard

6.0%

Up from 5.0% in 2024
2.5% below nat av of 8.5%

Working at the higher standard - Disadvantaged pupils

2.4%

Up from 1.4% in 2024
1.2% below nat av of 3.6%

Working at the higher standard- SEN Support pupils

0.9%

Down from 1.5% in 2024
1.1% below nat av of 2.0%

Working at the higher standard - EHCP pupils

0.4%

Up from 0.0% in 2024
0.3% below nat av of 0.7%

Outcomes : Key Stage 2 (KS2) - Reading

Working at the expected standard % (EXS)

74.4%

Up from 72.9% in 2024
1.4% below nat av of 75.8%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - Disadvantaged pupils

62.4%

Up from 59.3% in 2024
1.4% below nat av of 63.8%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - SEN Support pupils

47.6%

Up from 43.5% in 2024
2.9% below nat av of 50.5%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - EHCP pupils

14.1%

Up from 13.9% in 2024
5.6% below nat av of 19.7%

Working at higher standard

30.9%

Up from 25.8% in 2024
2.9% below nat av of 33.8%

Working at the higher standard - Disadvantaged pupils

19.3%

Up from 16.0% in 2024
2.2% below nat av of 21.5%

Working at the higher standard- SEN Support pupils

13.5%

Up from 10.3% in 2024
1.9% below nat av of 15.4%

Working at the higher standard - EHCP pupils

2.6%

Up from 2.4% in 2024
3.2% below nat av of 5.8%

Outcomes : Key Stage 2 (KS2) - Writing

Page 137

Working at the expected standard % (EXS)

72.4%

Up from 71.0% in 2024
0.2% below nat av of 72.6%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - Disadvantaged pupils

57.5%

Up from 55.3% in 2024
2.0% below nat av of 59.5%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - SEN Support pupils

38.9%

Up from 32.5% in 2024
0.2% above nat av of 38.7%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - EHCP pupils

9.7%

Up from 7.6% in 2024
3.1% below nat av of 12.8%

Working at higher standard

10.5%

Up from 9.5% in 2024
2.4% below nat av of 12.9%

Working at the higher standard - Disadvantaged pupils

5.3%

Up from 3.6% in 2024
1.3% below nat av of 6.6%

Working at the higher standard- SEN Support pupils

2.7%

Down from 3.0% in 2024
0.7% below nat av of 3.4%

Working at the higher standard - EHCP pupils

0.4%

The same as in 2024
0.8% below nat av of 1.2%

Outcomes : Key Stage 2 (KS2) - Maths

Page 138

Working at the expected standard % (EXS)

71.2%

Up from 69.9% in 2024
4% below nat av of 74.6%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - Disadvantaged pupils

57.4%

Up from 54.0% in 2024
3.5% below nat av of 60.9%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - SEN Support pupils

42.8%

Up from 40.5% in 2024
4.5% below nat av of 47.3%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - EHCP pupils

8.8%

Up from 8.4% in 2024
9.2% below nat av of 18.0%

Working at higher standard

21.3%

Up from 17.6% in 2024
5.3% below nat av of 26.6%

Working at the higher standard - Disadvantaged pupils

11.8%

Up from 9.5% in 2024
3.4% below nat av of 15.2%

Working at the higher standard- SEN Support pupils

7.5%

Up from 5.4% in 2024
2.5% below nat av of 10.0%

Working at the higher standard - EHCP pupils

1.8%

Up from 1.2% in 2024
2.5% below nat av of 4.3%

Outcomes : Key Stage 2 (KS2) - English grammar, punctuation and spelling

Working at the expected standard % (EXS)

66.3%

Up from 64.6% in 2024
6.9% below nat av of 73.2%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - Disadvantaged pupils

51.2%

Up from 48.5% in 2024
9.0% below nat av of 60.2%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - SEN Support pupils

36.2%

Up from 32.7% in 2024
5.9% below nat av of 42.1%

Working at the expected standard % (EXS) - EHCP pupils

9.3%

Up from 8.4% in 2024
7.9% below nat av of 17.2%

Working at higher standard

19.5%

Down from 21.4% in 2024
10.4% below nat av of 29.9%

Working at the higher standard - Disadvantaged pupils

10.2%

Down from 11.7% in 2024
8.6% below nat av of 18.8%

Working at the higher standard- SEN Support pupils

6.7%

Down from 6.9% in 2024
3.2% below nat av of 9.9%

Working at the higher standard - EHCP pupils

1.8%

Up from 1.6% in 2024
2.5% below nat av of 4.3%

Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - All Pupils

Attainment 8

43.0

Down from 43.1 in 2024.
2.9 below the
national score of 45.9

English and Maths 9-5

41.5%

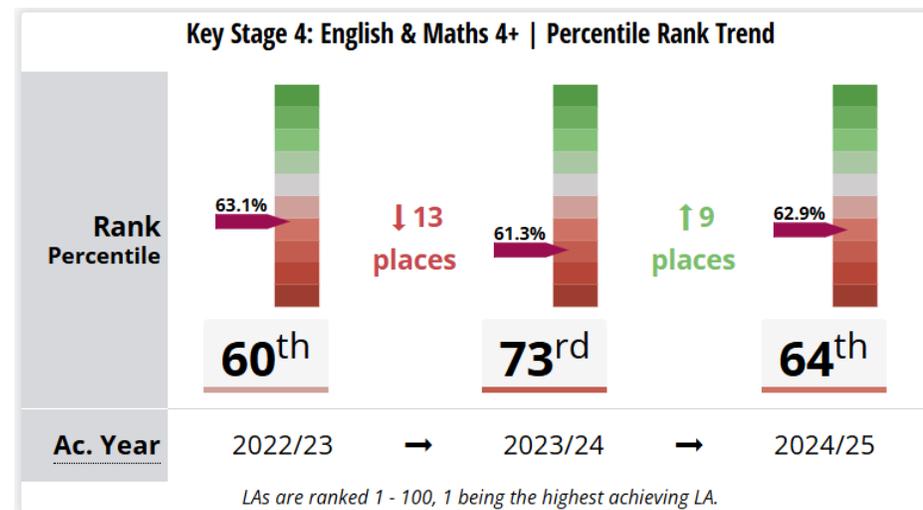
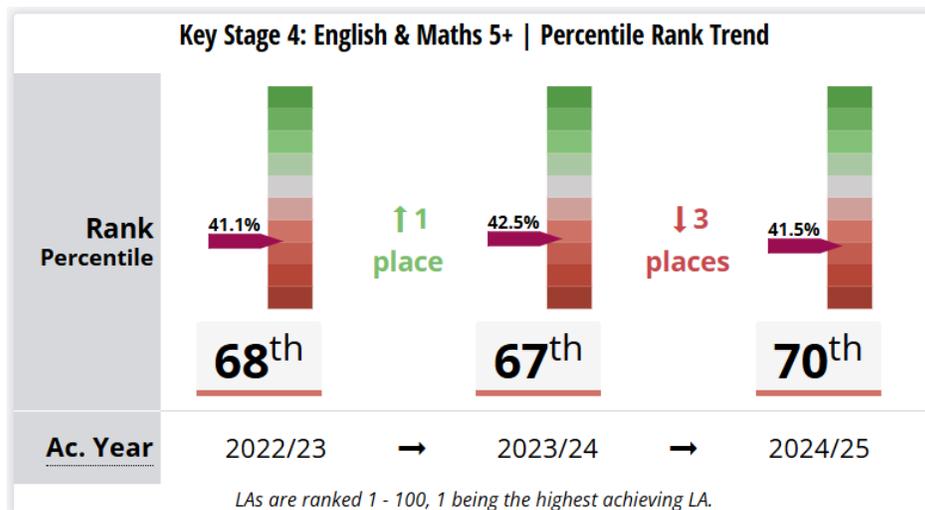
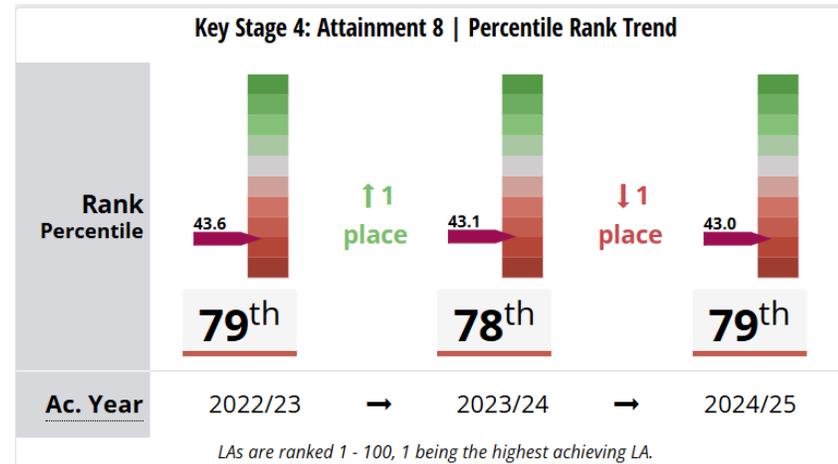
Down from 42.5% in 2024.
3.7% below the national
average of 45.2%

English and Maths 9-4

62.9%

Up from 61.3% in 2024.
1.6% below the national
average of 64.5%

Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - All Pupils



Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - All Pupils - Attainment

English 9-5

57.2%

Up from 56.2% in 2024.
3.0% below the national
average of 60.2%

Maths 9-5

47.5%

Down from 48.3% in 2024.
3.5% below the national
average of 51.0%

EBacc 9-5

16.2%

Down from 17.8% in 2024.
2.4% below the national
average of 18.6%

English 9-4

72.4%

Up from 70.5% in 2024.
1.7% below the national
average of 74.1%

Maths 9-4

67.8%

Up from 67.1% in 2024.
1.7% below the national
average of 69.5%

EBacc 9-4

23.2%

Down from 25.4% in 2024.
2.5% below the national
average of 25.7%

Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - Pupils groups - Attainment 8

Attainment 8
Disadvantaged pupils

30.3

Up from 30.1 in 2024
4.6 below the
national score of 34.9

Attainment 8
SEN Support pupils

28.9

Up from 27.4 in 2024
4.8 below the
national score of 33.7

Attainment 8
EHCP pupils

12.1

Down from 15.6 in 2024
2.7 below the
national score of 14.8

Attainment 8
Non-disadvantaged pupils

47.5

Up from 47.2 in 2024
2.8 below the national score of
50.3

Attainment 8
Non-SEN pupils

47.2

Up from 46.9 in 2024
2.9 below the national score
of 50.1

Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - Pupils groups - English and Maths 9-4

Page 144

English and Maths 9-4
Disadvantaged pupils

37.9%

Up from 34.6% in 2024
5.6% below the national
average of 43.5%

English and Maths 9-4
SEN Support pupils

32.7%

Up from 28.2% in 2024
5.8% below the national
average of 38.5%

English and Maths 9-4
EHCP pupils

8.8%

Down from 13.2% in 2024
5.1% below the national
average of 13.9%

English and Maths 9-4
Non-disadvantaged pupils

71.7%

Up from 69.9% in 2024
1.0% below the national
average of 72.7%

English and Maths 9-4
Non-SEN pupils

71.1%

Up from 68.9% in 2024
1.2% below the national
average of 72.3%

Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - Pupils groups - English and Maths 9-5

English and Maths 9-5
Disadvantaged pupils

20.2%

Up from 20.0% in 2024
5.4% below the national
average of 25.6%

English and Maths 9-5
SEN Support pupils

16.4%

Up from 14.8% in 2024
5.9% below the national
average of 22.3%

English and Maths 9-5
EHCP pupils

6.3%

Down from 7.6% in 2024
1.2% below the national
average of 7.5%

English and Maths 9-5
Non-disadvantaged pupils

49.0%

Down from 49.7% in 2024
3.8% below the national
average of 52.8%

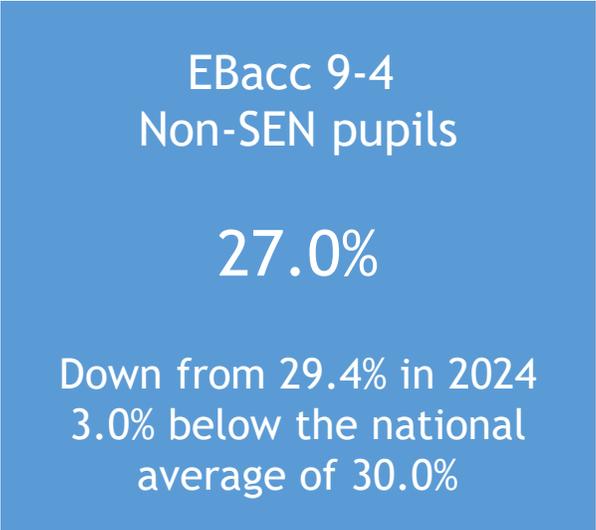
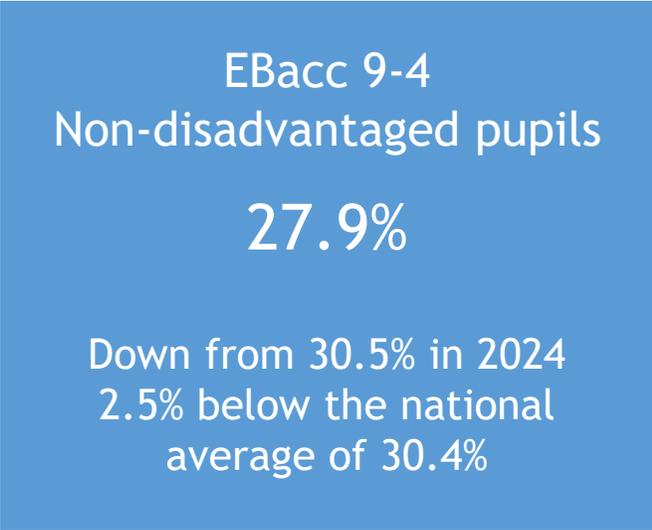
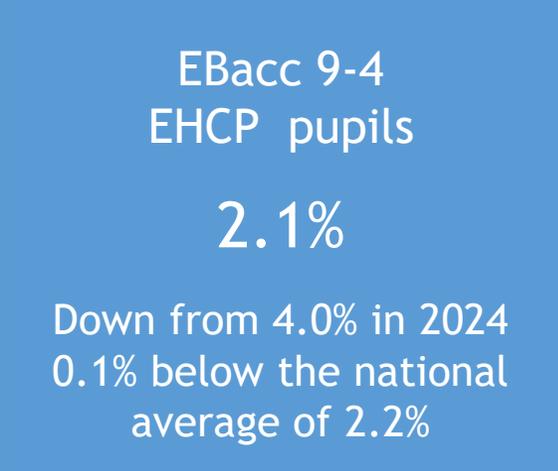
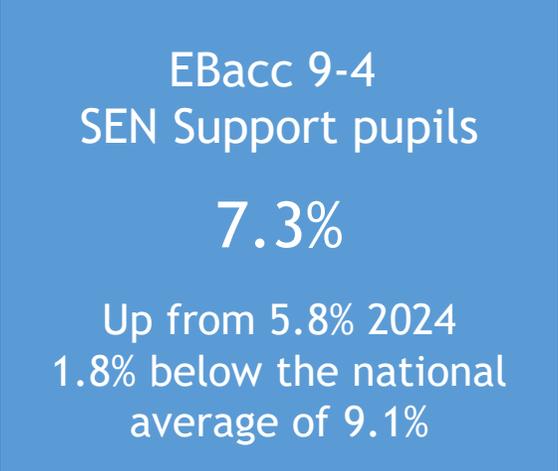
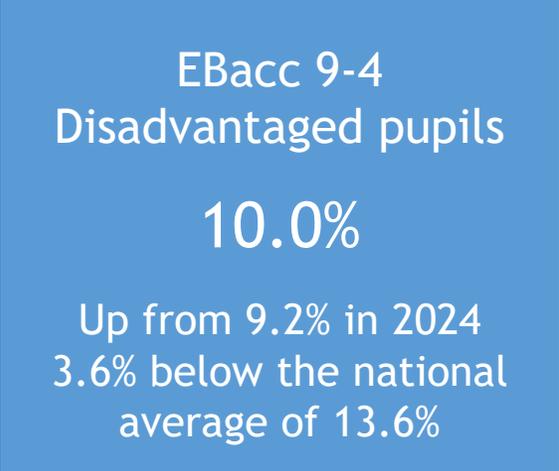
English and Maths 9-5
Non-SEN pupils

47.7%

Down from 48.5% in 2024
3.8% below the national
average of 51.5%

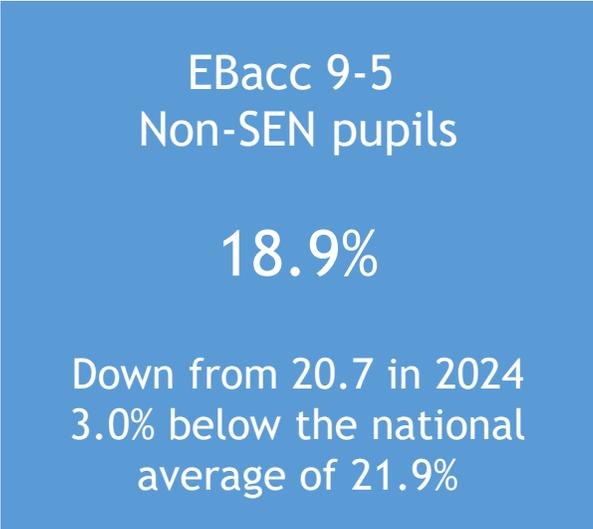
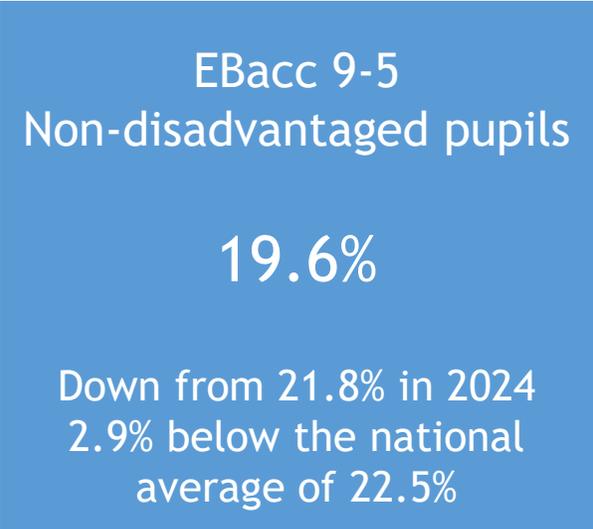
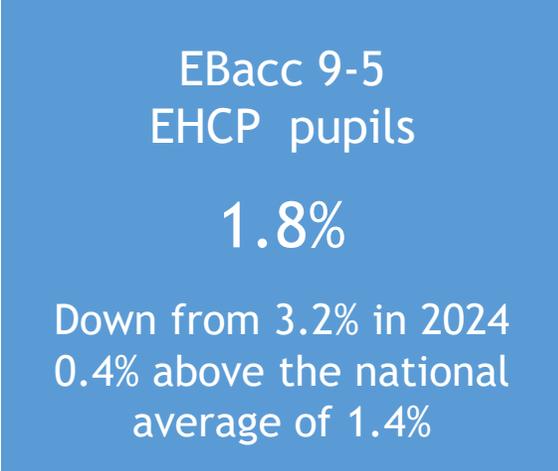
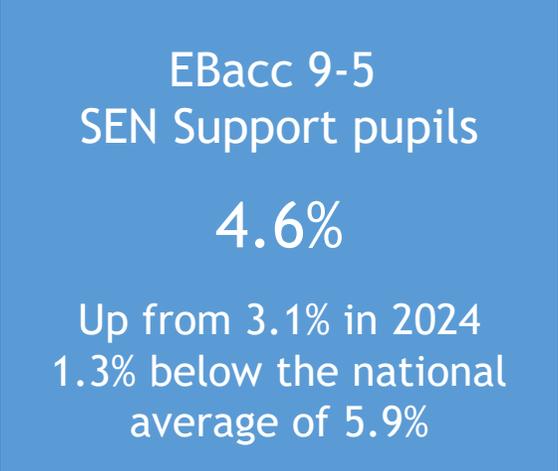
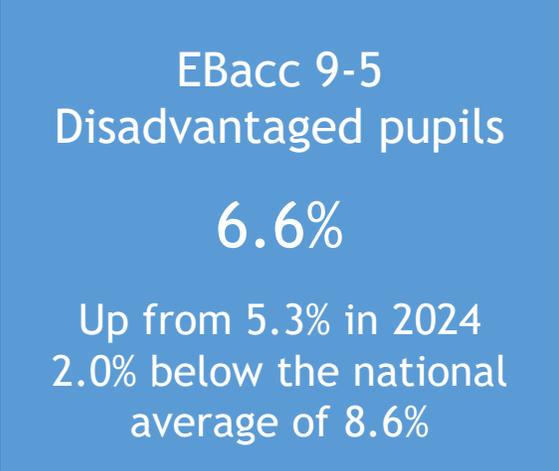
Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - Pupils groups - EBacc 9-4

Page 146



Outcomes : Key Stage 4 - Attainment - Pupils groups - EBacc 9-5

Page 147



Secondary: Outcomes by Area Group

2025	Attainment 8	English & Maths 9-5	English and Maths 9-4
National	45.9	45.2	64.5
East Sussex	43.0	41.5	62.9
Area Group 1 <i>Lewes, Wealden and Coastal</i>	46.4	47.8	69.3
Area Group 2 <i>Eastbourne and Hailsham</i>	43.3	40.8	63.7
Area Group 3 <i>Rother, Rye and Hastings</i>	42.9	40.0	61.8

Outcomes: Post 16 - State Funded Schools

A Level Students - APS per entry

32.66 C+

Down from 32.88 in 2024
2.83 below nat av of 35.49 B-

Academic Students - APS per entry

32.76 C+

Down from 32.91 in 2024
2.80 below nat av of 35.56 B-

Tech Level Students - APS Per entry

27.22 Merit+

Up from 27.16 in 2024
6.78 below nat av of 34.0 Dist

Applied General Students - APS Per entry

27.24 Merit+

Down from 27.59 in 2024
4.17 below nat av of 31.41 Dist-

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Report to:	People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	12 March 2025
By:	The Chairperson of the East Sussex SACRE
Title:	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report
Purpose:	To update Members on the work of the East Sussex SACRE

RECOMMENDATION:

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to comment on and note:

SACRE's statutory role in advising the local authority on Religious Education and collective worship, overseeing the Local Agreed Syllabus, monitoring standards, and fulfilling its legal duties in relation to determinations and annual reporting.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This annual report is prepared by East Sussex's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). It provides an overview of the support offered for Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship during the academic year 2024–25. SACRE also advises the Local Authority on matters relating to RE and Collective Worship. This report is a public document and is shared with the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the Department for Education (DfE).
- 1.2 During this academic year, SACRE has fulfilled all its statutory responsibilities. Our work has focused on embedding the Agreed Syllabus; developing subject expertise in religious education; providing guidance and training on Collective Worship; and strengthening understanding of community cohesion. As schools have grown in confidence with curriculum development and delivery, members have increasingly undertaken school visits to observe the impact of this work directly. These visits also enable members to hear the views of pupils, teachers, and school leaders, offering valuable insight into how the curriculum is developing across the county.
- 1.3 SACRE meetings remain well attended, with members demonstrating strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils receive high-quality religious education. Councillors bring valuable local knowledge and contribute to the Local Authority's wider work on community cohesion. Discussions have focused on strengthening support for teachers, providing clear and reliable guidance for leaders and governors, and evaluating the effectiveness of SACRE's work. A five-year forward plan underpins this work and supports the effective operation of the committee.
- 1.4 Primary and secondary subject networks continue to be central to SACRE's support for schools and are strengthened by the high-quality resources associated with the Agreed

Syllabus provided through RE Today. These networks promote collaboration and professional dialogue, enabling schools to share effective practice. As a result, the syllabus supports both pupils' understanding of religion and worldviews and teachers' confidence and subject knowledge.

- 1.5 Alongside regular review of the Agreed Syllabus and continued work on inclusive Collective Worship, SACRE has reviewed its policies and procedures to ensure they remain current, robust, and effective. This enables members to engage meaningfully with visiting speakers at meetings, broadening understanding of different beliefs and worldviews and how these are reflected in educational practice.

2. Statutory Responsibilities – Local Agreed Syllabus

- 2.1 The East Sussex Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, *Faith and Belief in the 21st Century*, is the statutory curriculum for all maintained schools in the county and has been in place since September 2022. Its development involved consultation with external experts from RE Today, alongside contributions from school leaders, teachers, pupils, and families. The syllabus incorporates *Understanding Christianity*, previously used by Church of England schools, ensuring continuity and coherence across different school contexts.
- 2.2 The Agreed Syllabus is licensed for five years and made available to all schools in East Sussex, with SACRE meeting the associated costs. This includes a comprehensive professional development programme. It is encouraging that an increasing number of single academies and smaller multi-academy trusts are choosing to adopt the syllabus.
- 2.3 The syllabus is current, inclusive, and academically rigorous. It covers major world religions, non-religious worldviews, and thematic ethical questions, structured around three core strands: understanding beliefs, recognising impact, and making connections. Additional lesson plans support Key Stages 1 to 3, with a core study programme for Key Stage 4 developed by the Specialist RE Advisor, Claire Ramalli, and local teachers in partnership with RE Today.
- 2.4 For the third consecutive year, professional development has been delivered through primary and secondary subject networks, facilitated by RE Today specialists. These networks continue to support both specialist and non-specialist teachers. While the primary network benefits from consistently high engagement, participation in the secondary network remains more variable.
- 2.5 Primary Lead, Claire Rivers, and Secondary Lead, Sam Keddie, bring substantial curriculum development and leadership experience of their own, ensuring participants find the content of sessions relevant and the opportunity to come together valuable. Subject Network Meetings have been led by professionals such as Julia Childs exploring 'Oracy and Worldviews' covering techniques such as 'triple coding'; Glenn Skelhorn discussing 'Philosophy for teens'; and Katie Harrison sharing the benefit of her experience on delivery of Collective Worship.
- 2.6 Three twilight sessions are offered annually alongside a phase conference. The primary conference was attended online by around fifty teachers and led by Julie Childs, National RE Advisor, focusing on inspection, subject leadership, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and RE as well as creative approaches to teaching Judaism. The

secondary conference, hosted by Chailey School, was attended by eight teachers and led by Ian Nicholson and Angela Hill, addressing SEND, diversity, leadership, and assessment.

- 2.7 This year, Karen Sitwell-Cook became the SACRE representative for special schools and specialist provision. Discussion focused on embedding RE within specialist curricula through assemblies, school councils, and reward systems. Flexible and creative approaches were identified as key to enabling pupils with SEND to access their entitlement, particularly through festivals, celebrations, and exploration of diverse worldviews.
- 2.8 Survey feedback from the primary phase indicated that teachers feel well supported in implementing the Agreed Syllabus and highly satisfied with the professional development offered. Respondents noted that the syllabus is relevant to pupils' lived experiences and supports confident discussion of religion and worldviews. Teachers highlighted the benefits of the spiral curriculum model in securing understanding over time, while also identifying that some theological concepts remain challenging and require careful adaptation.
- 2.9 Two priorities for further development have been identified: improving accessibility for all learners and strengthening assessment practice. These areas will be explored further in the coming year. Specialist Leader in Education Lois Burton offered to support schools in developing *Understanding Christianity*, alongside bespoke support from the Specialist RE Advisor.
- 2.10 Secondary schools reported similarly positive views of the syllabus. Uptake among academies continues to grow, although engagement with the secondary network remains limited to a core group of schools. Sessions are delivered both online and in person, supported by a growing digital resource bank hosted on Padlet.
- 2.11 SACRE also reviewed the Oak National Academy Religious Education resources during the year. These materials were recognised as a useful supplementary tool, particularly for non-specialist teachers and for supporting SEND pupils, but not as a replacement for the locally agreed syllabus.
- 2.12 Throughout the year, SACRE members undertook several Good Practice Visits to celebrate effective curriculum delivery, promote adoption of the Agreed Syllabus, and identify expertise to share through the subject networks. School visits included St Peter and St Paul's Primary School, Ninfield Church of England Primary School, Christ Church Church of England Primary and Nursery Academy, and The Haven Church of England Methodist Primary School, all of which had recent positive SIAMS outcomes.
- 2.13 In July, members visited All Saints and St Richard's Church of England Primary School, a small voluntary-aided school. They observed an assembly, Collective Worship, and an RE lesson on Judaism, noting that spirituality is embedded across the curriculum and that Year 6 pupils take on leadership roles in worship, contributing to an inclusive and positive ethos. Opportunities shared by Members to draw on external speakers from different faiths, beliefs and worldviews were seen as helpful. As a result, SACRE will continue to promote the RE Hub and speaker provision to schools.
- 2.14 Good Practice Visits typically include meetings with senior leaders, lesson observations, attendance at Collective Worship, pupil voice activities, and discussion with subject leaders.

Members consistently report high levels of teacher engagement, enthusiasm, and commitment to inclusive curriculum development.

- 2.15 The Local Authority provides SACRE with annual entry and attainment data. Take up of the full course GCSE in summer 2024 remained static at 22.3% of the cohort, below the national figure of 33.5%. Attainment also remained broadly stable. Several schools—Beacon Academy, Chailey School, Priory School, St Catherine’s College, St Richard’s Catholic College, and Uckfield College—achieved results significantly above the national average. Our goal is to reach national attainment standards, and we continue to view the full course qualification as the best option for fulfilling statutory requirements at Key Stage 4.

3. Statutory Responsibilities – Collective Worship

- 3.1 SACRE oversees schools’ statutory responsibilities for Collective Worship. While many schools provide high quality opportunities, SACRE has focused on addressing inconsistency by strengthening understanding among those responsible for delivery and providing clear guidance and training.
- 3.2 In June 2025, SACRE published updated guidance outlining legal requirements for Collective Worship, clarifying its educational purpose, inclusive nature, and distinction from assembly and religious education. The guidance addresses festival marking, visitor involvement, music, special school contexts, and the process for applying for a Determination where necessary. It also provides practical considerations for music, special schools, visitor contributions, and the process for seeking a Determination if a school cannot meet the legal requirements. SACRE members have made Collective Worship a feature of their Good Practice Visits.
- 3.3 Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship. Guidance regarding best practices and procedures for withdrawal is available to schools on our regularly updated website: [Czone – SACRE](#). Further assistance is also available from the Specialist RE Advisor as needed. While SACRE acknowledges the legal right of parents to withdraw, it encourages all children and young people to participate in enriching and engaging Collective Worship opportunities.
- 3.4 No complaints were made to SACRE during the year about Collective Worship.
- 3.5 No applications were submitted for a determination to vary statutory requirements. SACRE’s Determinations Policy was revised in accordance with NASACRE guidance and received approval in June 2025. The subsequent review is scheduled for June 2027.

4. Links with other organisations

- 4.1 East Sussex SACRE maintains engagement with national events and initiatives. Members remain informed via NASACRE termly briefings and participate consistently in online training sessions. Both the Chairman and Specialist RE Advisor deliver regular reports addressing local, regional, and national matters.
- 4.2 Training accessed this year by Members includes: ‘Calling all members of SACRE Group D - How to be an effective member of your SACRE’; ‘Being an effective SACRE Clerk’; ‘Working on an Agreed Syllabus Conference – supports and processes’; ‘How can SACREs make

strategic use of the New Oak National Curriculum?'; and 'Supporting your SACRE as a Professional Advisor'. Members also regularly join 'In Conversation with NASACRE' sessions.

- 4.3 Our Specialist RE Adviser engages actively in regional and national professional networks to ensure our work remains current and well informed. She participates in NASACRE Southeast 'In Conversation' meetings, reviews effective practice from across the region, and disseminates relevant updates to members. As an executive member of the Association for Religious Education Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC), she remains closely engaged with emerging research in Religion and Worldviews. She also promotes the work of RE Hubs to support the delivery of high quality Religion and Worldviews provision. In addition, she supports two other SACREs, sits on the NASACRE Executive, and contributes to curriculum development for Oak National Academy, further strengthening the strategic expertise that informs our work.
- 4.4 SACRE maintains a strong partnership with RE Today to support the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus. We also utilise resources provided by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), the professional association committed to supporting and advancing practitioners within the field of Religious Education.

5. Other areas of SACRE involvement

- 5.1 SACRE continues to deliver a Westhill Endowment funded project promoting diversity and understanding through visits to places of worship. A 12 month extension has been agreed, with filming taking place at a synagogue, mosque, and a Humanist naming ceremony. The resulting film will support teaching of the Agreed Syllabus.
- 5.2 In response to international events, members remained alert to the potential for antisemitism in schools. Resources shared with SACRE included Jewish Living Online (JLO), a KS3 resource designed to support RE, History, and Citizenship teaching through accessible content, contemporary Jewish voices, and ready-made assessment materials.
- 5.3 SACRE also shared information about Generation 2 Generation, a Holocaust education charity offering free school visits and digital sessions led by second and third generation survivors, supporting understanding through lived experience and personal testimony.
- 5.4 As a follow up to last year's Pupil Conference, we plan to organise another event for schools in June 2026 sponsored by a local multi-academy trust.

6. SACRE Arrangements

- 6.1 There were three SACRE meetings during 2024/25. All were held in a hybrid format that allow in person or online attendance making sure they were quorate.

Meetings were held:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| • 19 November 2024 | Attendance: 60% |
| • 25 February 2025 | Attendance: 70% |
| • 3 June 2025 | Attendance: 71% |

- 6.2 The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was also held on 25 February 2025. Cllr Colin Belsey was reappointed Chairman and Peter White reappointed Vice Chairman. All meetings are open to the public and minutes available online.
- 6.3 We ensure balanced representation of different faiths and belief systems, bringing together participants from the Church of England (including the Diocesan Board of Education), as well as members of the Southeastern Baptist Association, Unitarian Church, Bahá'í, Jewish, and Humanist communities.
- 6.4 East Sussex SACRE has five of the fifteen representatives from 'Other Christian denominations and other Religions' (Group A); two of the four representatives from 'The Church of England' (Group B); six of the six representatives from 'Teacher Associations' (Group C); and five of the five representatives from 'The Local Authority' (Group D - appointed in conformity with the political balance).
- 6.5 At the end of the academic year, Jon Gilbert, School Effectiveness Officer for the Diocese of Chichester, stepped down from his role after many years of service. In May 2025, SACRE welcomed Cllr Anne Cross as the fifth representative of the Local Authority. We welcomed a new clerk, Rebecca Harmer, and agreed to review how Group C – Representatives of Teacher Associations were allocated. Although we are committed to broadening our membership to better represent the county's diverse faiths and beliefs, attracting new members remains a significant challenge.
- 6.6 We are in the second year of our three year development plan, which aligns with our self-evaluation's five sections. SACRE's main priorities are Religious Education standards, Collective Worship, and promoting community cohesion. We continue to enhance our work through thorough self evaluation and policy review.
- 6.7 SACRE has determined a five year forward plan to ensure effective running of the committee into the future. This enables Members to focus on understanding the quality of support being offered, developing trustworthy advice and guidance for schools and increasing the amount of direct work they undertake such as Good Practice Visits and provision of an annual pupil conference.
- 6.8 Through SACRE's page on the Local Authority's website, we aim to provide authoritative and trustworthy resources for schools. This year we have published two pieces of guidance: "Including pupils of faith in school life" and "Collective Worship – Advice to Schools". Both have been welcomed by schools for their clarity and conciseness.
- 6.9 We actively encourage a variety of guest speakers to attend our meetings, including representatives from different faith groups as well as teachers and leaders who help deliver the Agreed Syllabus. This approach helps us gain a deeper understanding of their work and find the best ways to support them in enhancing the quality of religious education. This year, we welcomed Lois Burton, Primary Specialist Leader in Education for Religious Education who discussed her experience of the Agreed Syllabus and 'Understanding Christianity'. She also shared the use of Godly play resources and story sacks to enhance school environments. This includes persona dolls in Early Years to represent key characters from the major world faiths.

- 6.10 Ellie Canavan-White, Head of RE at The Priory School, Lewes, reported positive experiences of the syllabus and discussed strengthening it through regular review questions at the end of lessons and units to support understanding and assessment. A key challenge is inconsistent prior knowledge in Year 7, particularly differences in RE knowledge between community and church schools, especially in Christianity. Assessment includes knowledge checks and extended writing tasks, and opportunities for closer collaboration with feeder primary schools have been explored.
- 6.11 Each meeting has a budget update and closes with consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. An updated 'Constitution' was considered and adopted over the course of the year. All other documents are on a two year review cycle to ensure Members discharge their statutory duties effectively. Members have also begun to consider the implications for Religious Education following the release of the Curriculum and assessment review Final Report in November 2025.
- 6.12 SACRE receives a budget of £10,000 which sustains our main activities – though this would need to be reviewed when we hold the next Agreed Syllabus Conference. Given the proposed reorganisation of local government, SACRE has determined it appropriate to extend the current Agreed Syllabus by one additional year at the next Agreed Syllabus Conference to align with new Local Authority structures.
- 6.13 Given the licence fees for the current Agreed Syllabus have been paid, the budget covers the costs of the accompanying training package from RE Today, engagement with NASACRE including attendance to their annual conference, as well as the provision of a Specialist RE Advisor and two Subject Network Leads. SACRE is also supported by a Children's Services Representative and an experienced Clerk.

7. Advice to the Local Authority

- 7.1 SACRE is legally obliged to produce an Annual Report, and it is best practice for this to be considered by the County Council. The following advice is given by SACRE to the Local Authority:
- Consider the financial and strategic implications of a one year extension to the Agreed Syllabus Conference, to ensure continuity and effective consultation during local government reorganisation and potential changes to county council structures.
 - Continue to support SACRE in sustaining and diversifying its membership, so that representation reflects the breadth of faiths, beliefs, and worldviews across the county.
 - Maintain investment in professional development, subject networks, and advisory capacity, recognising their positive impact on curriculum quality, inclusion, and teacher confidence.
 - Promote SACRE's role within the school led system, including its work on community cohesion, Collective Worship, and good practice, to ensure schools are aware of the statutory support available.

Councillor Colin Belsey

Chair of SACRE

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