

LEAD MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

DECISIONS made by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment, Councillor Claire Dowling, on 8 September 2025 at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes

Councillors Belsey, Bowdler, Cross, Howell, Maples, Rodohan, Stephen Shing and Taylor spoke on item 4 (see minute 11)

Councillor Redstone spoke on item 5 (see minute 12)

Councillors Galley and Maples spoke on item 7 (see minute 14)

7. DECISIONS MADE BY THE LEAD CABINET MEMBER ON 16 JUNE 2025

7.1 The Lead Member approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2025.

8. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

8.1 There were none.

9. URGENT ITEMS

9.1 There were none.

10. REPORTS

10.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

11. PETITION TO STOP STAGECOACH CHANGING THE 51 BUS SERVICE TO EASTBOURNE FROM HALF HOURLY TO HOURLY

11.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport together with written comments from Local Member, Councillor Standley.

11.2 Ms Erin Wigham, the Lead Petitioner for the petition calling on the County Council to Stop Stagecoach from changing the 51 service to Eastbourne to hourly from half-hourly spoke to highlight loss of passenger confidence in Stagecoach to provide a reliable and punctual 51 bus service and concerns regarding the lack of response from Stagecoach to address passenger complaints.

DECISIONS

11.3 The Lead Member RESOLVED to advise petitioners that:

(1) Stagecoach cannot sustain a half-hourly bus service between Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells due to the considerable costs involved coupled with passenger numbers;

(2) The level of ongoing annual subsidy from the County Council could not be accommodated within current Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding allocations without compromising other bus services and county-wide fare initiatives; and

(3) The County Council will continue to work with Stagecoach to identify and implement highways measures to reduce service delays, as well as improved real time information for passengers to help achieve improvements in service timekeeping which are key outcomes of the East Sussex BSIP.

REASONS

11.4 The Council has considered the petition calling on the County Council to work with Stagecoach to maintain a half hourly bus service between Eastbourne, Heathfield and Tunbridge Wells, which the bus operator reduced to hourly from 30 March 2025.

11.5 Whilst a higher frequency is more desirable, the current hourly frequency is still running at a loss of hundreds of thousands of pounds a year. Stagecoach cannot financially sustain a half-hourly bus service between Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells due to the considerable increase in costs involved and the relatively low number of passengers.

11.6 The County Council is reliant upon future revenue funding allocations from UK Government so it can continue to support what is a growing number of socially necessary services which bus operators can no longer provide on a commercial basis. Funding must be prioritised to support services that are fully withdrawn, rather than maintaining a higher frequency on a continuing route where there are low levels of passenger use. The level of ongoing annual subsidy from the County Council that would be required to maintain such a frequency could not be accommodated within BSIP funding allocations without compromising the continuation of other bus services and county-wide lower fare initiatives which provide excellent value for East Sussex residents.

11.7 The County Council has worked with Stagecoach to resolve a morning timetabling issue for the 51 service and an issue regarding reduced service capacity between Heathfield and Tunbridge Wells schools. The County Council will continue to work in partnership with

Stagecoach to try and ensure the best possible bus service for the communities on the route of service 51 and will continue to work with Stagecoach to identify and implement highways measures to reduce service delays, as well as improved real time information for passengers to help achieve improvements in service timekeeping which are key outcomes of the East Sussex BSIP.

12. EAST SUSSEX LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4 (LTP4) - FUNDING REQUEST ASSESSMENT PROCESS

12.1 The Lead Member considered a Report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

DECISIONS

12.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

(1) agree the revisions to the current scheme request assessment process, to ensure alignment with the East Sussex Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4);

(2) note that the approach will be subject to ongoing review to establish whether any further changes are required to inform future Capital Programmes for Local Transport Improvements and any further revisions will be reported to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment for approval; and

(3) note that consideration will be required regarding the anticipated changes coming forward as part of the provision of a longer-term funding settlement for transport in association with proposed establishment of the Sussex Mayoral Combined County Authority from May 2026.

REASONS

12.3 With the change in policy direction for the authority as set out in the East Sussex LTP4, the request assessment process, which includes both the high level sift and the detailed appraisal assessment, have been updated to reflect these changes. The proposed assessment process will ensure that a balanced Capital Programme for Local Transport Improvements is developed in 2026/27 which includes schemes that align with the East Sussex LTP4.

12.4 To ensure that the approach remains relevant and robust, a further review will be undertaken following the development of the 2026/27 Capital Programme for Local Transport Improvements. This will be timely as the Council will also consider the anticipated changes coming forward as part of the provision of a longer-term funding settlement for transport in association with the proposed development of the Sussex Mayoral Combined County Authority, which would come into effect in May 2026. If any further changes are required to the request assessment process, this will then be reported to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment to seek approval.

13. HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE INCENTIVE FUNDING 2025/26

13.1 The Lead Member considered a Report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

DECISIONS

13.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

- (1) Note the information provided in the report regarding highway maintenance grants; and
- (2) Approve the draft East Sussex County Council Incentive Fund Report to the Department for Transport at Appendix 1 of the report.

REASONS

13.3 In order to achieve maximum Government funding for highway maintenance, the Council will need to demonstrate that it meets certain best practice criteria and share this with the Department for Transport. If the Council fails to do so the Government may withdraw £1,392,500 from the 2025/26 Highway Maintenance Block funding.

14. REVIEW OF STRATEGIC HIGHWAY POLICIES AND ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS

14.1 The Lead Member considered a Report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

DECISIONS

14.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

- (1) Note the outcomes of the strategic review process;
- (2) Approve the revised versions of the:
 - a) Highways Asset Management Policy as set out at Appendix 3 of the report;
 - b) Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy as set out at Appendix 4 of the report;
 - c) Highway Network Resilience Plan as set out at Appendix 8 of the report;
 - d) Highways Drainage Asset Management Policy as set out in Appendix 5 of the report;
 - and
 - e) Drainage Asset Management Plan (DAMP) as set out at Appendix 6 of the report;

and

(3) Approve the implementation of new policies:

- a) Commuted Sums Policy and Guidance Note as set out at Appendices 9 and 10 of the report; and
- b) Winter Service Policy as set out at Appendix 11 of the report

with immediate effect, subject to final formatting and publication.

REASONS

14.3 This scheduled review forms part of the Council's planned cycle of strategic document updates. It builds on the established and effective framework provided by the existing strategic highway policies and asset management plans, ensuring they remain fit for purpose and aligned with current legislation, national guidance and recognised best practice. The review is a proactive measure to maintain clarity, consistency, and transparency in the Council's approach.

14.4 Approval of the revised documents and new targeted policies:

- Maintains the Council's Department for Transport Incentive Fund Band 3 status, securing the highest level of funding available.
- Provides clear, documented frameworks for decision-making, complementing the robust approaches already in place.
- Strengthens planning for severe weather, enhance drainage management, and ensure investment priorities are based on risk and whole-life value.
- Formalises a consistent, transparent approach to developer contributions through the Commuted Sums Policy; and
- Establishes a clear basis for responding to future winter service network requests without altering existing agreed routes, ensuring continuity while improving clarity.

14.5 These updates do not reduce service levels or change existing commitments, and no additional funding is required. They have been developed entirely within existing budgets and staffing resources and are designed to strengthen the Council's asset management approach, improve operational practicality, and provide greater transparency for Members, staff and the public.

14.6 The revisions and new policies reflect developments in legislation, national guidance, and asset management practice, and have been informed by benchmarking with other high-performing authorities and the Council's own advancements in asset management maturity.