

National and Local Policy Outlook 2023

1. Introduction and Contents

1.1 This appendix provides an overview of the key developments in the national and local context that will influence and inform our future service and financial planning through the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process for the 2024/25 financial year and beyond. It also provides an update on work to deliver the County Council's local priorities and summarises key strategic challenges for our services.

1.2 Recent developments in national policy and the Council's broader operating context have been significant and continue to evolve. In a speech delivered in January 2023, the Prime Minister outlined his Government's five main priorities, which were: halving inflation, growing the economy by creating better paid jobs, reducing national debt, cutting NHS waiting lists, and passing new laws to prevent small boat crossings and to remove anyone entering the country illegally. In addition to these priorities, the 'Levelling Up' agenda remains central to Government policy, aiming to address geographic disparities between places and regions in the UK. With a general election expected to be held at some point in 2024 (and no later than January 2025), there is uncertainty about the general direction of Government policy beyond this time and whether there is sufficient time for Government to implement all the reforms it intends to in the lifespan of the current Parliament. A King's Speech, expected in autumn 2023, will set out the planned legislative programme.

1.3 Within this broad policy agenda, Government is progressing a number of specific public service reforms that will affect the way we deliver Council services in future, each with associated risks and implications that we must understand, assess and respond to. These include: reforms to ensure the sustainability of Adult Social Care (ASC); the recently published national review of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs); proposed reforms to the children's social care system and market; changes to the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) system; planning reforms being progressed in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill; the intended integration of Local Enterprise Partnership functions into local government; and a range of reforms continuing to emerge from the Environment Act 2021. Further information on these reforms and what they mean for East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is set out below.

1.4 Locally, significant work is taking place, as an organisation and with our partners, to respond to national developments, to progress our local priorities and to prepare for future challenges. Detail on this work is set out below, particularly in sections on our work with communities, to deliver transport improvements, to protect the environment and tackle climate change, and to drive sustainable economic growth.

1.5 This appendix has been written to be easily navigable to specific sections for future reference (using the below contents list), as well as providing a comprehensive single overview of developments. It includes information on:

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2. Overall Context

2.1 The following section provides an overview of the overall economic, fiscal and policy context the County Council is operating and planning within, and details of new arrangements for assessing the performance of local authority services.

National economic outlook

2.2 The national economic outlook remains uncertain. In its March 2023 economic forecast, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) set out that the near-term economic downturn was expected to be shorter and shallower, medium-term output to be higher and the budget deficit lower, than at its previous forecast in November 2023. The International Monetary Fund has upgraded its forecasts for UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP), now projecting growth of 0.4% in 2023 and 1.0% in 2024. Wholesale gas prices have more than halved over the past six months and are expected to fall further, and the OBR now predicts that Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation will fall sharply to 2.9% by the end of the year. However, despite these positive developments, the economy still faces significant challenges. Inflation remains high, with CPI at 8.7% in the 12 months leading up to April 2023, which represented the first time the rate fell below 10% since August 2022. Inflation continues to fall by less than expected as falling gas prices are offset by rises in food prices, which on average are 19.1% higher than in April 2022. Inflation levels continue to be impacted by global supply chain issues, worsened by the ongoing war in Ukraine. In response to high inflation the Bank of England raised interest rates by a further 0.25 percentage points in May to 4.5%, with further rises considered likely.

2.3 High levels of inflation are driving historic falls in real household disposable income which, in March 2023, the OBR predicted would fall by a cumulative 5.7% over the two financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24, resulting in the increased cost of living being experienced by residents and businesses. In light of these pressures, the Government has announced a number of measures to support people with the rising cost of living. This includes £1bn to facilitate the extension of the Household Support Fund (to 31 March 2024);

additional payments of £900 paid to those on means-tested benefits, £300 to pensioner households and £150 to people on disability benefits; keeping the triple lock on state pensions; increasing the National Living Wage to £10.42 for over 23s from April 2023 and raising benefits payments by 10.1% in April, in line with inflation.

2.4 Further support was announced at the Spring Budget on 15 March 2023. These measures included extending the Energy Price Guarantee for an additional three months (April to June 2023), extending the temporary 5p fuel duty cut for an additional 12 months (until March 2024) and cancelling the planned increase in line with inflation for 2023-24, £100m to support charities and community organisations helping vulnerable people, and over £60m to support public swimming pools in England with rising energy costs.

2.5 Alongside this, the Government announced measures to help grow the UK economy to support higher paid jobs, increase living standards and strengthen public finances, including:

- Introducing a Universal Support programme to match people with disabilities and long-term sickness with jobs and provide support and training to help them succeed.
- Increasing Work Coach support and work search requirements for those claiming Universal Credit and strengthening support for claimants who are carers of children.
- Abolishing the Lifetime Allowance charge on private pensions.
- Expanding childcare support to help parents return to the workforce, including plans to provide 30 hours a week of free childcare for 38 weeks a year, for eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to 3 years and funding to substantially uplift the hourly rate paid to providers to deliver the existing free hours offers in England.
- Creating 12 Investment Zones across the UK to drive business investment and Levelling Up, each backed with £80m over five years including generous tax incentives.

2.6 Data on the East Sussex economy, cost of living and labour market are set out in Appendix 1 – Focus on East Sussex. Output of the East Sussex economy remains below the national average; Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour in East Sussex (a measure of the goods or services produced in an area per hour worked in that area) was 23.2% below the England level in 2020 (£29.41 per hour, against £38.29 per hour in England). The unemployment rate for March 2023 was 3.6% for East Sussex, slightly lower than the national average of 3.8%, but above the regional average of 2.9%. The number of people claiming unemployment related benefits was down 14.2% since March 2022, but still remains 23.8% higher than in March 2020, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2023, the youth unemployment rate (those 18-24 claiming unemployment benefits) was 5.8%, which was slightly lower than in March 2022 (6.2%), but still higher than the England rate of 4.9%, and above pre-pandemic levels. Further information on the national labour market picture and recruitment and retention challenges this presents for ESCC are set out at 10.5-10.8.

Levelling Up

2.7 The Levelling Up agenda, which aims to address disparities across the UK in economic prosperity and general standards of health and quality of life, remains important to the UK Government's agenda.

2.8 To help deliver on this agenda, the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) is being progressed through Parliament and aims to make provision for the setting of national Levelling Up missions and reporting on progress in delivering them. It is currently at the committee stage in the House of Lords. The Bill contains a number of key reforms, including: a system of brownfield-first development; the introduction of Spatial Development Strategies; reduced 'top down' housing targets; streamlining the local plan process; the new Infrastructure Levy, and measures to deliver on plans for increased devolution.

2.9 To support the Levelling Up agenda, the Government has made funding available to local authorities through a number of competitive bidding streams (discussed in more detail in the economy section of this appendix). This includes the second round of the Levelling Up Fund, which has been released and included funding for Rother District Council, with a third round due to follow. An additional £211m has been announced for 16 regeneration projects across England (none in East Sussex).

2.10 Twenty areas have also been invited to form Levelling Up Partnerships with the Government, including Hastings and Rother. Areas selected were based on analysis in the Levelling Up White Paper which considered places in England against four key metrics: the percentage of adults with Level 3+ qualifications; Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked; median gross weekly pay; and healthy life expectancy. These partnerships are intended to deliver £400m in Government funding to drive 'bespoke, place-based regeneration' and build on previous partnerships between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Blackpool, Grimsby in north-east Lincolnshire, and Blyth in Northumberland.

Devolution

2.11 The Government has maintained its commitment to agreeing a devolution deal with any area of the country that wants one by 2030. To that end, so far six deals have been published outlining the details of agreements between DLUHC and areas named within the nine County Deal pilot devolution areas announced in the [Levelling Up White Paper](#). None of the deals have yet been ratified, and all are subject to a public consultation, agreement through the relevant councils' governance process, as well as parliamentary approval of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

2.12 Deals that have been published to date are largely at Level 3 of the devolution framework set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, which involves adopting a directly elected mayor or leader. The Government continues to prioritise negotiations with areas pursuing deals of this kind. In addition to these deals, the Government has announced two 'trailblazer' deeper devolution deals with the combined authorities of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. These are set to serve as the blueprint for deeper devolution across the rest of England and, if agreed, intend to transfer additional powers and funding to help local leaders deliver on their priorities. Each will get new funding settlements agreed at the next Spending Review, to invest in local priorities.

2.13 To support current and future devolution arrangements, DLUHC recently published the first edition of the English Devolution Accountability Framework, which will form part of the broader Local Government Accountability Framework. It sets out how those who lead or work for institutions with devolved powers will be held accountable in between public elections. The framework is structured around three key forms of accountability: local scrutiny/checks and balances; accountability to the public and accountability to the UK Government. It will also establish a new scrutiny protocol to embed a sustained culture of scrutiny into these institutions.

2.14 An announcement on the next wave of deals is awaited. ESCC will continue to monitor how these deals progress to better understand the opportunities and risks associated with them.

Office for Local Government

2.15 In June 2022, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced the creation of a new body: the Office for Local Government (Oflog). This followed plans outlined in the Levelling Up White Paper to introduce a new independent data body to improve transparency of local government performance. In January 2023, Lord Morse was appointed as Interim Chair of Oflog.

2.16 This new body will assemble, analyse, and publish data relating to local government performance with the aim of increasing transparency, fostering accountability and using data to improve local government performance and to help identify problems at an earlier stage. It will form a part of the broader Local Government Accountability Framework, which will continue to develop throughout 2023. The first phase of Oflog's development will focus on four policy areas: adult social care, adult skills, waste management and reserves. A policy document will be published imminently to provide further information on the development of Oflog.

Updated inspection regime

2.17 Over the last year there have been a number of changes to inspection regimes for local authority provided services. This includes new powers for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to assess local authority Adult Social Care (ASC) services on how they are discharging their duties under the Care Act 2014. Up to 25 councils will be assessed in 2023/24 with a target of all ASC departments being assessed within two years. Each ASC department will receive a rating, with the timing of individual authorities' inspections currently unknown. In anticipation of the new inspection process, we are making preparations, using the [CQC assessment framework](#) as a useful way to identify our strengths and areas for development.

2.18 Additionally, in November 2022, Ofsted and CQC launched a new joint framework for inspecting provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) which took effect from January 2023. The new regime focuses on the effectiveness of a local area partnership's arrangements and whether these are delivering improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND. It will also include an evaluation of commissioning and oversight arrangements for children and young people in alternative provision, something the previous regime did not do. The new regime does not use the standard Ofsted grading system, and areas will instead receive one of three possible broader ratings.

2.19 ESCC can expect to receive inspections under these and ongoing regimes, including a local area SEND inspection and a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) for Children's Services in 2023, and an ASC inspection within the next two years. In addition, we also expect there to be an inspection of our youth justice service in 2023.

Local government finance outlook

2.20 The outlook for local government funding remains unclear. Funding that ESCC will receive from central Government between 2024/25 – 2026/27 is yet to be confirmed and, while the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2022 included some indicative figures for two years of funding (notably for social care), the Local Government Financial Settlement was only a one-year settlement for 2023/24.

2.21 The 2022 Autumn Statement announced several measures to support social care and hospital discharge, including the continuation of the Services Grant and the delayed rollout of Adult Social Care charging reform from October 2023 to October 2025. Whilst this enables us to maintain a degree of financial stability for 2023/24, demand and costs will continue to grow. There will be additional expectations arising from national reforms in this and other areas, bringing new and sustained financial and service pressures which will impact on our medium term financial plan (MTFP) and ability to meet needs.

2.22 The ongoing delay to the Fair Funding Review has meant greater uncertainty about the shape of any long-term sustainable settlement for local authorities. At a local level, the potential impact the economic downturn and increased cost of living will have on the collection of business rates and council tax respectively has yet to be fully assessed. There

is a risk that the extension of Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme discounts by our district and borough councils will see reductions in the collection of Council Tax. 2022/23 has seen the level of debt rise, particularly for Adult Social Care contributions, and it is expected that this trend will continue into 2023/24.

2.23 For the Capital Programme, there remain challenges in the supply chain for materials and price pressures within existing contracts, the impact of which is exacerbated by delays to delivery. Further significant pressures may materialise as new schemes are developed or go out to tender. The current technical consultation on the Infrastructure Levy has added a level of uncertainty to the value of future developer contributions, which remain an important funding stream for the programme. The Capital Programme holds a contingency of £7.5m to meet these uncertainties.

2.24 While the Council's reserves have been applied and maintained within a robust reserve policy, the level of reserves held by local government is coming under increasing levels of scrutiny. It is likely that national government will require us to review our reserves strategy, with a potential to constrain our use of our reserves in maintaining a stable financial position.

3. Adult Social Care and Public Health

3.1 Whilst major reforms to adult social care (ASC) charging (reported at State of the County 2022) have been postponed until 2025, other national reforms are being progressed and teams across the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) department are continuing to respond to a range of national and local developments which are set out in more detail in the following sections. These include working with health partners to progress local health and social care integration and implementing initiatives to facilitate hospital discharge. Work to deliver local priorities and respond to strategic challenges, including market sustainability, workforce challenges, supporting the resilience of local communities and addressing threats to health is also covered here.

Health and Social Care Integration

National Health and Social Care Integration

3.2 Nationally, new Integrated Care System (ICS) arrangements came into effect from July 2022. The [Hewitt Review](#) was commissioned by Government later in 2022 to consider how the oversight and governance of ICSs can best enable them to succeed, balancing greater autonomy and robust accountability, with a particular focus on real time data shared digitally with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and on the availability and use of data across the health and care system for transparency and improvement.

3.3 The report, published in April 2023, called for the following:

- A shift from focusing on illness to promoting health;
- Delivering on the promise of systems;
- Unlocking the potential of primary and social care and building a sustainable, skilled workforce; and
- Resetting our approach to finance to embed change.

3.4 The role of local government and social care in the changes proposed is recognised throughout the report, starting with “the need to work on the basis of subsidiarity, through strong, empowered Place Partnerships and neighbourhood teams.” Key messages with particular relevance to ASCH include:

- A reset of national/local relationships with a shift away from a culture of top-down performance management to one of learning and improvement.

- The need for social care to be better understood within the NHS.
- The need for a national conversation about what we expect from our care, and what we are willing to pay for it.
- The vital role for ICSs in supporting a more sustainable social care sector at system level, by taking an integrated approach to reducing the gap between demand for care and available supply, for example by encouraging the adoption of personalised, preventative and proactive models of care.
- Broadening ICS collaboration beyond members of Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to encompass wider partners, including social care providers, the VCSE sector, and the independent healthcare sector to ensure they are fully engaged and their contribution better understood within the NHS.
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) should include within its assessment of ICS maturity how different partners, including local government, assess their engagement and relationships within the ICS itself, including the extent to which both public health expertise and the social care provider sector are involved in the leadership of the system.
- Using the proposed data framework for adult social care outlined in ‘Care data matters: a roadmap for better data for adult social care’ setting out what data the sector needs to collect, the purpose of those collections and the standard to which it is collected.
- The necessary focus on reducing elective care waits should be matched by an equal focus on reducing waiting times for acute mental health treatment.
- There should be an acceleration and expansion of existing work on understanding both need and the fair cost of care, before the proposed cap on adult social care costs is implemented.
- Recognition that children’s social care is linked to both adult social care and the wider health system and suggestion that the work to understand need and the cost of care should be expanded to capture working age adults and potentially children’s social care.
- That the Public Health grant should be increased.

3.5 The Government published a joint response to the 36 Hewitt Review recommendations and a report of parliament’s Health and Social Care Committee (HSCC) inquiry on ICSs on 14 June. Key points from the Government’s response include:

- Agreement with the proposed reduction of the number of overarching national targets imposed on ICSs, which will empower them to focus on priorities in their local areas.
- Development of a shared outcomes toolkit that will support places to develop their own robust shared outcomes, with priorities and metrics that are directly linked to the needs of their populations.
- Recognition of the importance of prevention to reducing overall demand on services, and that over time the focus of the NHS should increasingly shift towards implementing interventions to help improve prevention and support healthier life expectancy, rather than imposing a national expectation of a shift in spending in line with the 1% (at least) over the next five years recommended by the Hewitt Review.
- Confirmation that the future assessments of the effectiveness of ICS partnership working across the ICS will be undertaken by the CQC.

The response will contribute to shaping the future direction of ICS development nationally and locally and we will work with local ICS partners to review it in more detail and assess implications for the local system.

Local Health and Social Care Integration

3.6 ESCC has a key role in the new statutory arrangements for the local NHS that commenced on 1 July 2022, with representation on the NHS Sussex ICB and the Sussex Health and Care Assembly (the Sussex Assembly). The Sussex Assembly is the statutory

joint committee between ESCC, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and NHS Sussex.

3.7 In 2022/23 the new [joint Integrated Care Strategy 'Improving Lives Together'](#) was produced by the Sussex Assembly based on the population Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) for the three ICS 'Places' - East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove - and building on the priorities set out in the three Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) Strategies covering each area. This is in line with previous agreements about the role and primacy of 'Place' and Place-based health and care partnerships within the Sussex ICS, and follows national guidance and Hewitt Review recommendations concerning the principle of subsidiarity.

3.8 The Integrated Care Strategy builds on the shared priorities for our East Sussex population set out in the [East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) (2022 – 2027) covering health outcomes improvement, children and young people, mental health and integrated community health, care and wellbeing. It describes an overarching ambition for a healthier future for everyone in Sussex over the next five years, across the following priorities:

- Growing and supporting our Sussex health and care workforce
- Improving the use of digital technology and information
- Maximising the benefit of partnership working; building on the work currently underway and through developing integrated approaches to community teams and partnerships in Places and neighbourhoods.

3.9 A five-year Shared Delivery Plan (SDP) is being brought together to support the strategy, following national guidance issued by NHS England. Following consideration by each local authority, HWB and NHS Sussex, a full finalised Plan will be submitted to NHSE by 30 June 2023 covering year 1 (2023/24) and the high-level milestones for years 2-5 (2024/25 – 2027/28). This will cover existing delivery priorities and high level milestones for ongoing shared programmes of work as well as new delivery priorities in the following areas:

- Accelerating health outcomes improvement, specifically focused on cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, mental health and frailty/healthy ageing.
- Our model for delivering integrated health, care and wellbeing in communities.

Ongoing implementation of the strategy will be overseen at ICS level by the Sussex Assembly and at place level by each HWB.

Hospital Discharge

3.10 Successful utilisation of the additional £500m Government Social Care Discharge Fund, and other rapid improvement work over winter to help discharge patients safely from hospital and into onward care as fast as possible, led to a successful Sussex ICS bid to be one of six 'Discharge Frontrunners' nationally. This project will, in 2023/24, trial innovative long-term solutions to free up hospital beds and make sure patients get the right care at the right time, which could be rolled out across the NHS if successful. Each Discharge Frontrunner will receive specialist and tailored support, which will include evaluation, economic analysis, demand and capacity planning, leadership, and service design, as well as the ability to learn best practice from other areas.

3.11 In April 2023 the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund 2023/24 was announced. Local authorities must use this funding to build additional ASC and community-based reablement capacity to reduce hospital discharge delays through delivering sustainable improvements to services for individuals. Partners at Place level will finalise plans for use of this funding by the end of June 2023.

National Adult Social Care Reform – Next Steps

3.12 In April 2023 Government restated its committed to the 10-year vision for Adult Social care set out in the [People at the Heart of Care](#) white paper by publishing '[Next steps to put People at the Heart of Care](#)'. This plan sets out how it proposes to build on work to ensure Care (ASC) is of outstanding quality, personalised and accessible. It details how £700 million will be spent to continue transformation of the ASC system in England, including investment in:

- improved access to care and support
- recognising skills for careers in care
- driving digitisation and technology adoption
- data and local authority oversight
- support to enable people to remain independent at home
- encouraging innovation and improvement
- joining up services to support people and carers

Together, these measures aim to put people at the heart of social care and form the next step towards Government's 10-year reform vision.

Alongside the plan Government also:

- launched a call for evidence for the care workforce pathway
- published the Better Care Fund policy framework 2023 to 2025
- published guidance and conditions for the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF)
- provided £27 million to local authorities through a grant to streamline local authority adult social care assessment processes
- launched an expression of interest for year 2 funding of the Adult Social Care Technology Fund

3.13 Further detail on local work to support care market sustainability and address ASC workforce challenges is outlined below.

Adult Social Care data

3.14 '[Care data matters: a roadmap for better data for adult social care](#)', published in February 2023, sets out the Government's roadmap for improving how ASC data in England is collected, shared and analysed, building on the commitments made in the Health and Social Care data strategy, [Data Saves Lives](#) and the ASC reform White Paper, People at the Heart of Care. The roadmap is published in draft, and views are currently being sought from those involved in the delivery and commissioning of care, unpaid carers, clients, and members of the public. Based on this feedback, which ESCC will contribute to, the final version of the roadmap will be published at the end of 2023.

ESCC Strategy for Adult Social Care

3.15 Together with our residents and partners, we have developed an [Adult Social Care Strategy](#) for the county. Specific to East Sussex, and informed by wide engagement, the strategy provides a person-centred framework which gives direction for a range of stakeholders. It will help people know what to expect from ASC services and support, and identifies six priorities:

1. The right support, in the right place, at the right time
2. Information and communication about care and support
3. Cost of living and cost of care, now and in the future
4. A suitable home
5. Personal connections with others
6. Group activities, hobbies and volunteering

3.16 The strategy, to be launched in summer 2023, includes 14 'We will' statements and summarises how those working within and alongside ASC will respond to the priorities of local people. Once launched, these 'We will' statements will be converted into a detailed delivery plan which, in turn, will inform the department's core policies and practice. Alongside this, working with partners and other service providers to help residents (including those not receiving services) to share their experiences of these priorities, we will also adapt the way feedback is gathered from people receiving adult social care services so that it aligns with the six priorities.

Market Sustainability

3.17 The sustainability of the care market continues to be a significant issue both nationally and locally. Announced by Government at the Autumn Statement in November 2022, the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund is intended to support local authorities to make tangible improvements to adult social care services, to build capacity and improve market sustainability. This reflects local authorities' duty, under section 5 of the Care Act 2014, to promote the efficient and effective operation of the market for adult care and support as a whole. Government considers that three vital target areas underpin the overarching objective of building capacity and improving market sustainability. These are:

- increasing fee rates paid to adult social care providers in local areas;
- increasing adult social care workforce capacity and retention; and
- reducing adult social care waiting times.

3.18 Locally a range of pressures are impacting on care market sustainability. National and international economic conditions have increased the cost of providing services and delays to major national reform programmes have led to uncertainty. The increase in the National Living Wage from April 2023, whilst welcome particularly in light of workforce shortages, also presents a cost pressure for many care providers. The ASC Market Support Team continues to work closely with local providers, the CQC and NHS to support and strengthen the independent care and support market, improve and sustain quality improvements, prevent business failure or service deterioration and identify and address business continuity and sustainability concerns. This supportive partnership approach has been successful in helping to ensure overall quality provision within the county.

ASC Workforce Challenges

3.19 Local and national recruitment continues to be a challenge across the ASC sector which has a significant impact on independent provider services as well as ESCC teams. To address this ESCC has established a three year ASCH workforce programme with six areas of focus: strategic workforce planning; recruitment; retention; enhancing the wellbeing of the workforce; leadership and management and building and enhancing social justice in the workforce.

Local Public Health priorities

3.20 A new Public Health Board is in place with representation from all parts of the Council and the NHS Sussex ICB. The Public Health Board will ensure that priorities to tackle health inequalities are aligned across the Sussex Health and Care Partnership (SHCP).

Health protection and addressing threats to health

3.21 Maximising our health protection expertise and impact to protect health in a wide range of settings is vital. This includes launching our new health protection strategy that sets out our broad priorities now that we have moved beyond Covid-19. The strategy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the local authority, NHS, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and other key partners involved in health protection, and how the system fits together locally. It demonstrates a joined-up, multi-agency approach to health protection, focusing on

minimising health inequalities and the impacts of the wider determinants of health. It states key indicators of success and outlines categories for health protection action into the life course approach.

Recovery and Renewal

3.22 Covid-19 has exacerbated existing health disparities for many and along with current economic conditions, results in even greater challenges in addressing the wider determinants of health. Work with communities and system partners to mitigate the impacts of Covid continues, applying lessons learned on what worked well for communities and co-producing solutions to longstanding underlying causes of health disparities.

3.23 We will continue to develop plans to address the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of all affected groups. This includes building on the Making it Happen Programme which works with residents in East Sussex who want to build on the positive things that exist in their neighbourhood. We will also progress the Connected People and Places project and the recommendation to establish a 'stewardship approach' to tackling loneliness. This encompasses a collaborative approach to the design and commissioning of a programme of work with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and other partner agencies.

3.24 The use of research and developing evidence is core to Public Health, and this is being strengthened to address inequalities and support community recovery locally. Public Health has responded to the National Institute for Health Research's call for Health Determinants Research Collaborative funding to create innovative research collaborations between local government and the academic sector that focus on improving the wider determinants, or drivers, of health. This aims to maximise impact on established and persistent causes of health inequalities that affect coastal and rural communities in East Sussex. Should the East Sussex proposal progress to stage two of the process during the summer the outcome of the funding bid will be completed in December 2023. If unsuccessful the department will explore how elements of the proposal could be embedded.

Creative Health

3.25 The National Centre for Creative Health and the [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing](#) is currently undertaking a Creative Health Review which will highlight the potential for creative health to help tackle pressing issues in health and social care, including health inequalities and the additional challenges we face as we recover from Covid-19. Locally, within the NHS and social care, there is growing recognition of the important role that creative health can play in supporting our health and wellbeing.

3.26 A Creating Healthier Lives – Arts in Public Health workstream is being developed locally to sustain, improve and prevent ill health and promote wellbeing through arts, creativity, and culture. The plan will link in with the [East Sussex Cultural Strategy](#) and support community recovery and renewal. A position paper introducing the work will be published later in 2023, outlining our statement of intent and commitment to developing a strategic plan that works for everyone across East Sussex.

Suicide prevention

3.27 Public Health led on the creation and monitoring of the East Sussex suicide and self-harm prevention plan. This is co-ordinated through a strategy group and broader multi-agency network group. Preventative approaches to the ongoing significant challenge of reducing deaths at places of high frequency is led by the Coastal Suicide Prevention Group. A new Pan-Sussex Suicide Prevention Strategy will be published early summer 2023, which will outline projects best delivered through collaboration between the three local authority areas, such as real time surveillance, communications, and the involvement of people with lived experience. Local plans in East Sussex will be developed subsequently during the summer months.

4. Children's Services

4.1 Major national policy reviews relating to Children's Services have been published in recent months, including the Government's response to national reviews of children's social care and the children's social care market. The Government has also released its Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan, as well as announcing that it no longer intends to bring forward the Schools Bill in the current Parliament. This section also summarises priority focus areas for Children's Services locally, including implementation of Family Hubs, a Family Safeguarding model and our local SEND strategy. In addition, there is information on demand-led service pressures and the impact these are having, work with schools to improve post-pandemic educational recovery, attendance and mental health and emotional wellbeing, and increase in demand for home to school transport.

National reforms to Children's Social Care

4.2 In February 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published its response to three reports: the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review on the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, and the Competition and Market Authority Children's Social Care Market study. The [DfE's response](#) included an initial implementation strategy and consultation on its proposals, together with a wide range of policy commitments and the announcement of £200m of additional investment over the next two years. The strategy is focused on phase one of the Government's reforms, up to the end of the Spending Review period in March 2025.

4.3 The strategy commits to resetting children's social care to ensure that love and stable relationships are at the heart of the work done by children's social care. It is focused around the following six key pillars, with each pillar having detailed proposals:

- Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families;
- A decisive multi-agency child protection system;
- Unlocking the potential of family networks;
- Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care;
- A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one;
- A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data.

4.4 It also outlines proposals for Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) to address the significant national sufficiency challenges in placements for cared for children. The DfE intends to work with local authorities, health, justice and the third sector to co-design and co-create RCCs in two areas, with a view to further roll out after testing and evaluation with the sector.

4.6 A 'Children's Social Care National Framework' is being developed as part of the implementation strategy. This will describe the outcomes that local authorities should aim to achieve for children, young people and families, with associated performance indicators. The strategy also includes a new five year post-qualifying 'Early Career Framework', which will be aligned to the Children's Social Care National Framework and is intended to include the skills and knowledge needed to deliver on the strategy's key priorities such as increased use of kinship care and loving relationships for children in care.

4.7 Given concerns about the impact of the use of agency social workers in terms of both cost and workforce sufficiency, the Government is consulting on whether to set national rules on agency usage. It is proposed to establish price rates for agency workers and a requirement that agency social workers have five years post qualifying experience.

4.8 The initial £200m financial commitment associated with strategy implementation includes a number of pathfinder and pilot programmes, such as £45m to deliver the Families First for Children Pathfinder, and £30m to increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes. Before the next Spending Review period the DfE intends to update, publish and consult on a new formula for children and young people's services funding.

4.9 ESCC agrees that reform and investment is required to ensure the right systems are in place to not only protect children, but to help them and their families to thrive. The focus on earlier help, support that builds on the strengths within a child's wider family network, and a greater ambition for our children in care, and care experienced by young people, align with the priorities and practice of ESCC Children's Services. The Council has recently responded to the three DfE consultations.

Service Demand

4.10 Over recent years Children's Services both nationally and locally have experienced a significant increase in demand. Local Government Association (LGA) analysis shows that since 2010 there has been a 53% increase in the number of children subject to child protection planning and a 28% increase in the number of children in care nationally. This has been further exacerbated by the pandemic and, more recently, the cost of living increases, with a continued projected increase in demand and complexity, specifically in the areas of child protection planning and looked after children.

4.11 Over the past two years, in line with national trends, ESCC has experienced a 37% increase in demand at the front door, an 18% increase in the number of social care assessments being undertaken with children and families, and a 32% increase in children subject to child protection planning. There has been an 6% increase in the number of looked after children since 2020 (not including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children). The demand for support has undoubtedly put pressure on the service and it will be important to continue to ensure we have sufficient capacity to meet our statutory duties. Over the last two years, as a service of last resort, we have also needed to provide some direct support to families, in terms of accommodation or other support, and this requirement is expected to continue.

4.12 In line with the national picture, ESCC also continues to experience significant challenges identifying sufficient high quality placements for children in care. Children's Services has been highly successful in supporting children to live within kinship care arrangements wherever possible. However, it is becoming increasingly challenging to identify appropriate placements and the price of placements has significantly increased. Demand for residential provision outstrips supply. Providers have become risk averse to offering placements to children with complex behavioural needs (because they present greater risk of missing episodes, challenging behaviours, and Ofsted notifiable incidents). The high demand in the system has also led to an escalation in the price that some providers are now charging.

4.13 Rigorous steps are taken to manage the market and individual contracts with providers. East Sussex is part of a commissioning framework agreement with other local authorities to improve leverage in purchasing placements and Heads of Service meet regularly with providers to address the safety and quality of placements as well as value of contracts. However, external consultancy support has been engaged to review the scope for different approaches which might help us secure more cost effective options. The interests of children will remain paramount in our approach.

Local Service Developments

Early Intervention, Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme

4.14 In March 2022 the DfE announced that East Sussex was one of 75 local authorities selected for a share of a £302m fund to establish [Family Hubs and the Start for Life programme](#). ESCC has been awarded £4.6m for this programme over 3 years, with an additional £100,000 to deliver a 'Trailblazer' programme on peri-natal mental health.

4.15 ESCC's local Family Hubs build on the current Children Centre and integrated Early Help offers and support families with babies, children and young people from birth to 19 (or 25 for young people with SEND). The Hubs, the first of which are being launched in summer 2023, will provide a one stop shop approach, delivering a range of help, including for physical and mental health, housing, debt advice, youth services, domestic abuse support, as well as links to local voluntary and community sector organisations. At the heart of ESCC Family Hubs will be the Start for Life support, helping parents build strong relationships with their babies by providing parenting classes, health visiting support, infant feeding advice and peri-natal mental health.

4.16 A multi-agency Early Intervention Board was established in 2022/23 which is overseeing this programme as well as the development of an overarching Early Intervention Strategy, incorporating a wide range of early intervention programmes across the county including local implementation of the national Supporting Families programme and the Youth Justice Service 'Turnaround' preventative programme.

Family Safeguarding

4.17 In 2023/24, following a £2.3m annual investment by ESCC, Children's Services will be launching the Family Safeguarding model of child protection as a further development to our Connected Families service for families with children aged 11-17 who are at risk of needing to become looked after. The Family Safeguarding model provides intensive support for adults in three key areas: domestic abuse, mental health, and substance misuse. These areas are the most common factors nationally and locally in assessments of the needs of children for protection, and areas where demand for support services exceeds the available supply. They are often co-morbidities and are a significant factor in family breakdown, premature deaths, and poor outcomes for people with care experience. Family Safeguarding will be an important part of the way we seek to manage demand for social care.

4.18 ESCC's approach to Family Safeguarding will draw on models implemented elsewhere in the country, as well as reflecting and enhancing our own successful and well-established East Sussex 'Connected Practice' approach, which is strength based, trauma informed and relationship-based. ESCC has an established and effective multi-disciplinary SWIFT service and 'Foundations' programme which this initiative will build upon to offer earlier intensive support and interventions to families and increase resources for reunification.

4.19 The Family Safeguarding model aligns with the DfE's children's social care reform implementation strategy outlined in more detail above. This highlights that Children's Services should draw on a multidisciplinary workforce with the time, skills, and autonomy to give children and families the support they need, pursuing improved outcomes for both adults and children. Delivery of the model in East Sussex is planned to commence in January 2024.

SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan

4.20 The [SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#) is the Government's response to the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper consultation and outlines an

ambition to improve inclusive practice in mainstream schools so that more children and young people with SEND can be supported in their local mainstream school without the need for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). However, the development of new guidance for all schools is not expected to be complete until 2025. The Government is also establishing Regional Partnerships to support development of special educational needs provision, with which ESCC will be engaging.

4.21 In line with the national picture, East Sussex continues to see significant increases in demand for statutory assessments and specialist provision for children and young people with SEND. The number of EHCPs has increased by 19% from 3,678 in April 2022 to 4,380 by the end of March 2023. We will continue to work proactively, analysing data to project future demand, and working with schools and Trusts to develop more specialist provision where this is appropriate. In 2022, alongside partners in the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) the Council published a new 2022-2025 SEND strategy which sets out our high-level direction, keeping children and young people and their families at the forefront of our local priorities.

4.22 We continue to work with schools to try to reduce the number of children and young people who are excluded from schools, which in East Sussex remains above the national average, and the corresponding need for alternative provision.

Schools policy

4.23 The Schools Bill, which was to implement legislation to support the [White Paper, Opportunity for All](#), is no longer being taken forward. However, the DfE remains committed to the objectives that underpinned the bill, which include the aspiration for all schools to become part of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). The Council will continue to play a critical role in facilitating strong local partnerships between schools and working with the Joint Primary and Secondary Board to shape a strong and cohesive school landscape across all phases, including through MAT development.

4.24 The DfE has confirmed its intention to pass legislation which will see local authorities obliged to maintain a register of children of compulsory school age who are not enrolled at specified categories of schools such as state schools, registered independent schools and non-maintained special schools. The Council will respond to this new duty when it is put into place.

Education recovery and supporting attainment

4.25 East Sussex has been identified by Government as an Education Investment Area (EIA) and Hastings as a Priority Investment Area. As an EIA, MATs that are interested in expanding or setting up in East Sussex are prioritised for development funding from the DfE. As a Priority EIA, Hastings will receive funding up to August 2025 to improve educational outcomes.

4.26 The pandemic has had a significant adverse impact on school attendance, with a doubling, both nationally and locally, of the proportion of children persistently absent from school, defined as more than 10% of sessions. The Government has published new attendance guidance to clarify responsibilities for local authorities, schools, parents and carers. By September 2023, the expectation is that all councils should strengthen their oversight of attendance through regular individual dialogue with all schools, and provide whole family early help support, free of any charge, to schools and all families of children whose attendance is less than 50%.

4.27 Locally, there will be a continued focus on working with schools to improve the engagement of some families so that they ensure their children and young people are in school. Supported by additional investment of £1.5m annually to deliver the expectations set

by the Government in its new guidance, a new Level 2 Early Help Key Work service will be in place from September 2023 to work with children and young people and their families where attendance is below 50%.

4.28 East Sussex has high levels of suspension and exclusion and these are rising further in line with national trends. School leaders are experiencing increased levels and complexity of need in their school populations and the demand for support services remains high. The Council will continue to work with schools to develop effective strategies and joined-up approaches to meeting children and young people's needs, to increase engagement in learning and reduce exclusions.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools

4.29 Education is a protective factor against many of the risks to good mental health and wellbeing that face children and young people across East Sussex. A key area of our school improvement strategy involves opportunities for schools and settings to develop communities which promote and foreground good mental health and wellbeing. The Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), funded by the NHS and managed by ESCC, will continue to be integrated into the existing education and clinical landscapes to support this. Five MHSTs will continue to operate across the county, and we will work to embed them into 68 targeted schools. We will use the learning from these schools to champion a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Home to school transport

4.30 Recent rises in fuel costs and driver shortages have led to exceptional increases to the costs of contracts providing taxis for pupils requiring home to school transport. The majority of the spend on home to school transport relates to children with SEND, and the number of pupils with EHCPs has risen by 11.6% over the last three years and is forecast to rise a further 11.8% over the next three. Increased complexity of needs post pandemic and geographical spread reducing the possibility of taxi sharing are also driving cost increases, as are current market conditions which are leading to fewer providers bidding for routes and increased contract prices.

5. Migration

5.1 Over the last year the Government has developed new policy and legislation in relation to immigration, asylum, and refugee resettlement, in efforts to reduce pressures on current systems and services. These pressures arise from factors including an increasing backlog of asylum claims, slower than expected progress in resettling Afghans, significant numbers of Ukrainians arriving in the UK and an increase in small boat crossings via the English Channel.

5.2 Government's 'New Plan for Immigration' includes:

- A 'Full Dispersal' asylum system, incorporating all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales as asylum dispersal areas.
- The [Illegal Migration Bill](#) which aims to change the law on whether people arriving in the UK, outside of prescribed routes, can claim asylum in the UK, and to remove people more quickly.
- A [Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Rwanda](#) which includes an 'asylum partnership arrangement' that allows the UK to send some people to Rwanda who would otherwise claim asylum in the UK.
- A '[Streamlined Asylum Processing](#)' arrangement which aims to fast-track asylum claims in certain circumstances.
- Exploration of new [large asylum accommodation sites](#) to reduce the use of contingency hotels.

- [Additional funding](#) and policy measures to support the resettlement and accommodation of Afghans and Ukrainians.

5.3 Local authorities continue to play a key role in how these policies and schemes are implemented locally, working with the Government and local partners to ensure that those arriving will have access to safe accommodation, public services and community support. Further detail on the impacts for East Sussex and the County Council are outlined below.

Asylum Dispersal

5.4 The pressures described above have led to an increase in the use of hotels by the Home Office as 'contingency' accommodation for people seeking asylum, including in East Sussex. Although hotels in the county were already being used as short-term accommodation for adults awaiting Home Office decisions on their asylum applications, increasing numbers of people arriving in small boats in recent months and overcrowding at Manston migrant processing centre in Kent led to the Home Office arranging for new hotels to be stood up across the country, often at short notice.

5.5 The Home Office is also exploring the use of large sites, such as holiday accommodation, student accommodation or ex-military accommodation, as options for reducing the use of hotels; this includes the Northeye site near Bexhill. Concerns about the suitability of specific sites, relating to the welfare of those people who may be placed there and the stretched capacity of local services, are being discussed with key partners and Home Office officials to inform planning and decision making. ESCC continues to engage with Government officials to ensure the local context in East Sussex is understood.

Full Dispersal

5.6 The Government has extended responsibilities for asylum dispersal beyond previously specified areas (such as Hastings) and is asking all areas to take a role in dispersal, a model described as 'full dispersal'. Details of full dispersal plans for each local area are still emerging and local authorities are actively highlighting the risks and pressures to local services and infrastructure of additional asylum accommodation in East Sussex and the south east. The procurement of dispersal accommodation by the Home Office should take place after consultation with the relevant housing authority and we await further details on where accommodation may be procured in East Sussex. Areas will be allocated dispersal numbers, mainly based on a ratio to local population, and local authorities will be funded per dispersal bed.

Streamlined Asylum Process

5.7 The streamlined asylum processing model concentrates on legacy claimants from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, and Yemen (those claims made before 28 June 2022). The model allows greater flexibility in processing these claims to expedite those which are likely to be granted. For claims that are successful, people will become eligible for housing and other support and services which may temporarily increase pressure on those services. Further details on implementation in East Sussex are still emerging.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and the National Transfer Scheme

5.8 ESCC continues to accept Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which became mandatory in November 2021. In early 2022, the number of UASC each local authority was expected to care for through the NTS increased from 0.07% of the child population to 0.1%. Through a combination of spontaneous arrivals and UASC received through the NTS, we have seen a steady increase in the numbers we are supporting, which currently stands at 74 looked after children and 110 care leavers (a 16% increase on 2021/22). UASC represented 25% of ESCC new entrants to care in 2022/23 and now make up 30% of care leavers.

5.9 There has been an increase in the number of UASC placed in hotel accommodation by the Home Office, whilst awaiting transfer through the NTS to local authorities. In East Sussex, Children's Services has worked with the Home Office and partner agencies to ensure safeguarding services are in place. Weekly multi-agency meetings take place with the Home Office, health services and Sussex Police to address any safeguarding concerns. A significant number of UASC went missing from the hotels across the South East in 2022-23, including in East Sussex. In line with our safeguarding procedures multi-agency strategy meetings were convened for each child accommodated in East Sussex, with regular review meetings taking place whilst the child is still missing.

5.10 In the autumn of 2022/23, 47 young people accommodated in adult asylum seeker hotels in East Sussex came forward disputing their initial age assessment. Children's Services is required to undertake age assessments in each case. 50% of these young people subsequently became looked after by ESCC as UASC. The proposed development of Northeye as an asylum accommodation site could add significant further pressures to Children's Services capacity and sufficiency of placements if the same proportions of age disputes are seen.

5.11 The new Illegal Migration Bill aims to deter people from crossing the channel in small boats by preventing those that do so from claiming asylum in the UK and detaining and removing them from the country. It places a new duty on the Home Secretary to remove those entering the UK by irregular means via a safe country. The only exceptions to this duty are for people at risk of "serious and irreversible harm" and unaccompanied children until they turn 18. The Bill does not place any significant new duties on local authorities in relation to accommodating and supporting UASC. There is an expectation, however, that UASC will be moved quickly into local authority care and the Home Office will be required to step in through hotel provision only 'sparingly and temporarily'. The expectation is that once they reach age 18 the young people will be recalled by the Home Office and removed from the country.

5.12 It is currently unclear exactly what implications the legislation, if passed, will have for East Sussex. It is possible that the prospect of removal at age 18 will significantly increase the numbers of young people in our care or housed in hotels in East Sussex who go missing, which will place additional requirements on Children's Services as well as the Police locally. There are also tensions between this legislation and the current law in relation to the protection and wellbeing of children (the Children Act 1989) which could create challenges for our staff on the front line in terms of how they best support children until they reach age 18.

Refugee Resettlement

Afghan Resettlement Schemes

5.13 Government established two resettlement schemes for Afghan citizens. For councils who support refugees to resettle through the above schemes, the Government has provided a standard integration funding package. Refugees waiting to be resettled are placed in 'bridging accommodation' (usually hotels) until more permanent housing is found. There are no such bridging hotels in East Sussex, and district and borough councils lead on resettling Afghans in East Sussex.

Visa schemes

5.14 The Government has created schemes which enable people from certain states, for example Hong Kong, to apply for visas and enter the UK. The terms of these visa schemes vary, but they usually enable people to access services, benefits, and the right to work whilst in the UK. Numbers of people entering East Sussex on this visa are not available, but we

engage with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) and local partners to ensure people arriving in the county through this route can access the support they need.

Ukraine refugee response

5.15 In response to the refugee crisis arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Government established two main routes through which Ukrainian refugees can enter the UK - the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine (HfU), under which Ukrainian nationals can be sponsored to come to the UK by private individuals.

5.16 At the end of February 2023 almost 1600 Ukrainian guests had arrived in East Sussex on a HfU visa, matched with over 600 sponsors. To date upwards of 600 guests have moved on from their original hosts, with a high proportion of guests moving to positive accommodation outcomes, and around 60% of guests remaining with their original hosts. Ongoing support to hosts and guests remains vital to sustain arrangements and facilitate planned onward moves in a challenging housing market.

Future local support

5.17 In this context of new and developing policy and legislation, and the potential future impact of climate change and further international conflicts, expectations are that the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers may increase. Given the national expectation that all regions will contribute, it is anticipated that activity to support refugees and asylum seekers will be a significant and long term area of work and focus for the Council going forward. This will require development of our local resources, expertise and knowledge in these areas, a strengthening of existing and new partnerships, and a clear and joined up strategic approach across East Sussex and the wider region. This work will be led by the newly established Migrant Support Team, located in ASCH and working with teams across the organisation, including in Children's Services.

6. Communities

Financial Inclusion

6.1 In response to increases in the cost of living, and resulting impacts on households in the county, ESCC established the multi-agency Financial Inclusion Steering Group. The group brings together the VCSE, NHS, district and borough councils, DWP, and all ESCC departments to collectively work towards addressing financial inclusion.

6.2 The Steering Group has agreed a set of priorities to enable partners to better understand, develop and respond to the pressures that residents are experiencing. These include:

- strengthening data and developing a compelling evidence base;
- supporting cross-sectorial peer learning and knowledge sharing in relation to activities and services that can improve Financial Inclusion for residents;
- collaboratively developing approaches to service delivery that improve Financial Inclusion for the residents of East Sussex;
- maximising funding opportunities and the receipt of benefits and other support financial support to vulnerable residents and communities; and
- providing access to the right information.

6.3 This work is expected to be ongoing, with the priority being the identification of households in poverty or at risk of being in poverty and providing advice and support to ensure that they are in receipt of any benefits or other financial support that they may be eligible to claim.

Household Support Fund extension

6.4 The Household Support Fund (HSF) was introduced by Government in response to increases in the cost of living. Funding is aimed at anyone who is vulnerable or cannot pay for essentials and is distributed via local authorities. For 2023/24 ESCC will be receiving £7,793,567 from the HSF which will be allocated through several routes, reflecting national guidance that ESCC and partners should consider the needs of various households including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.

Community Networks

6.5 ESCC commissioned Collaborate Community Interest Company to review the learning from Covid-19 Community Hubs and recommend how our collective learning could help embed the benefits of Community Hubs in the longer term. The resulting Community Networks programme will ensure we align with the needs and priorities of partners and communities, including:

- contributing to our [Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) in East Sussex and our Sussex Integrated Care Strategy
- managing interdependencies with our Early Help strategy for families and the development of Family Hubs
- alignment with Local Plans at district and borough level
- alignment with Public Health led initiatives and programmes
- alignment with the priorities of the VCSE Alliance and wider VCSE sector.

6.6 The delivery of Community Networks in East Sussex, alongside other priorities, will be taken forward by the newly brought together Partnerships Team within ASCH, working across the Council and with key partners from the statutory and VCSE sector.

Community Safety

Community Safety Partnerships and Anti-Social Behaviour

6.7 The overall national policy for crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) is set out in the Government's [Beating Crime Plan](#). As part of this, an in-depth review of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) has been undertaken to initially improve their transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, before assessing their position within the wider landscape of local partnerships. It is considering introducing a new duty for CSPs to report on local ASB strategy and delivery to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), as well as legislation to set out the PCC role in the ASB Community Trigger process. The findings of this part of the review concluded that, although the importance of local partnerships such as CSPs was widely acknowledged, they were not being used as effectively as they could be.

6.8 In order to take this forward, the Government has recently published an [Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan](#) and launched a consultation which proposes changes to: the relationship between CSPs and PCCs, the role of both in tackling ASB, and the nature and application of the ASB powers currently available to police forces, local authorities and social landlords. The East Sussex CSPs already work closely with the PCC's office and receive annual funding from the PCC to support community safety initiatives. Although ASB is managed at lower tier authority level, ESCC is working with community safety partners and the Office of the PCC to design the operating model for the proposed 'immediate justice' service that will be rolled out across Sussex.

Serious Violence Duty

6.9 The Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022 has placed new duties on schools, police, councils, and health to prevent serious violence. The [Serious Violence Duty](#)

requires specified authorities, including councils and Youth Justice Services, to work together to produce an evidence-based analysis of serious violence in their local area and then formulate and implement a strategy detailing how they will respond to those issues. The Act and the Duty is far-reaching and will impact upon many of the services delivered by ESCC and its partnership arrangements. ESCC will have an essential and leading role to play to prevent and address serious violence, beyond involvement in the production of a needs assessment and strategy.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

6.10 The Modern Slavery Act 2015 and independent review 2021 sets out the policy context for local authorities in tackling these issues. [The Modern Slavery Bill](#) is currently working its way through parliament and aims to enhance the efforts in tackling modern slavery supply chains and to further strengthen support measures for victims of human trafficking. Councils have a key role to play in tackling modern slavery, including in identifying and supporting victims and working in partnership locally. The Council will be assessing compliance within the legislative framework by using the LGA 'maturity matrix', which provides a framework for local authorities to assess their current progress and plan future activity on modern slavery.

Preventing Violent Extremism

6.11 The policy context for this work is set out in a number of Government documents, including:

- the Counter-terrorism strategy [CONTEST](#) 2018, which aims to reduce the risk to the UK and its citizens and interests overseas from terrorism;
- the [Protect Duty](#) Bill, which aims to enhance national security by introducing new security requirements for certain public locations;
- changes to the Channel management process under the Government's Prevent anti-extremism programme, giving more responsibility and autonomy to local government safeguarding panels; and
- the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019

6.12 In 2023 the Home Office published the [Independent Review of Prevent](#) which considered the UK's strategy for protecting people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. The Government has accepted all 34 recommendations in full and these will inform the development of the East Sussex Prevent Plan for the current year.

National and local plans for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

6.13 The Government published the National VAWG strategy in November 2021 and the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan in March 2022. Its strategic priorities (of prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators and a stronger system and partnership working) align with the priorities set within the Pan-Sussex Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Abuse and VAWG Strategic Framework, which was updated in March 2022 to encompass VAWG and the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021. In order to meet the statutory requirement under Part 4 of the new Act, ESCC has a legal duty to support victims of domestic abuse and their children living in refuges and other safe accommodation. ESCC has been allocated funding for 2021-2025 to meet this new requirement.

Drug and alcohol treatment work and Project ADDER

6.14 The publication of the Government's new ten year Combatting Drugs Strategy ('From Harm to Hope') in 2021 requires local partnerships to establish an effective governance mechanism, undertake a comprehensive substance misuse needs assessment, and produce a local strategy. Additional Government resources are being made available to realise these requirements. This work is overseen by the East Sussex Harm to Hope Board, a sub-group of the East Sussex Safer Communities Board.

6.15 Additional Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant (SSMTRG), now including the funding for Project ADDER, has been made available to East Sussex from Government to meet the outcomes of the Combatting Drugs Strategy. The funding has enabled the expansion of Project ADDER from Hastings to the whole county. The Council has received funding from the SSMTRG - Housing Support Grant to support those in treatment with a housing need in East Sussex, with the aim of preventing people from losing stable accommodation, and funding from the Rough Sleeper Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant to deliver focused support to keep rough sleepers in Hastings engaged in drug and alcohol treatment.

6.16 The Council has also received additional funding from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities to improve access to inpatient detoxification, and to improve the employability of those in structured treatment. There are also significant contributions – both financial and in kind - to this area of work from ASCH, and the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner.

Trading Standards

6.17 The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill is currently being considered in Parliament. When it was first introduced the Bill was intended to revoke all pieces of EU derived legislation by 31 December 2023, unless specifically kept or replaced. However, the Government now intends to amend the Bill to replace the cut-off point with a list of 600 laws that will be replaced by the end of the year. Among the laws to be revoked or replaced are ones that may have a direct impact on Trading Standards and potentially our ability to intervene in consumer issues. We will monitor this closely, as any reforms in such a volume will potentially have an impact on Trading Standards and, depending on how they are implemented, our resources and focus.

Local resilience arrangements

6.18 In December 2022, the [UK Government Resilience Framework](#) was released. This sets out the Government's aspirations for widespread changes to the way in which resilience activity is managed within the UK and, in particular, how it can be integrated with wider policy areas. The approach in Sussex will be informed pilots which commenced in Spring 2023.

6.19 Rother District Council has joined the East Sussex Resilience and Emergencies Partnership (ESREP) which means that all local authorities in East Sussex are now members alongside East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. This will enable us to create shared, strategic approaches across the whole of Sussex to create efficiencies and opportunities to standardise ways of working across the county.

National planning reforms

6.20 The Government introduced the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) to Parliament in 2022, which emphasises the importance of a plan-led system (i.e. the Local Plan sets out where, when and how development will take place). This approach is broadly welcomed from by the County Council, although it will increase the need for timely and effective input into the district and borough Local Plan processes, particularly through our role as an infrastructure provider. Other changes and reforms proposed focus on matters including infrastructure funding, environmental assessment of proposals, enforcement, and providing additional protection to heritage assets. These will all impact on the Council, both within our County Planning Authority role and through our statutory consultee and infrastructure provider role. Identifying these impacts and ensuring that the Council can adapt its relevant service provision will be a critical task as the Bill progresses and more details are published.

6.21 In December 2022, the Government published further detail in a [consultation](#) that sought views on a proposed update of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which would set out how housing figures should be derived and applied so that communities can respond to local circumstances. No immediate changes to the standard method to calculating local housing need were proposed. The consultation also sought views on its proposed approach to preparing National Development Management Policies (NDMPs). These would be national policies with statutory weight – effectively ‘trumping’ local policies. The consultation provided only limited detail on NDMPs but it explained they would be set out in a separate (yet-to-be consulted upon) document.

6.22 The initial changes to the NPPF are expected to be published imminently and additional proposed changes are expected to be published for consultation later this year. Changes to national planning policy are having an impact upon the ability of local planning authorities to get an up to date Local Plans in place. In East Sussex, the majority of the county does not currently have an up to date Local Plan, meaning that the majority of development proposals that we are asked to comment upon, and plan for their infrastructure needs, are speculative in nature as they are not supported by an allocation in a Development Plan and are not part of a wider, holistic plan. Whilst this situation remains, workloads for our statutory consultee functions are expected to remain higher than normal and the ability to forward plan for infrastructure is undermined.

6.23 The Government has also published a consultation on the proposed Infrastructure Levy (IL). The IL would reform, and largely replace, the existing system of developer contributions (Section 106 planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy). The new system is intended to end lengthy negotiations and deliver a mandatory, streamlined and locally determined levy that will be calculated once a project is complete, instead of at the stage the site is given planning permission. The Government recognises that the levy will be a significant change so it will be introduced through ‘test and learn’ over a 10-year period. The Government intends for the reforms to give local leaders the tools to bring forward more infrastructure that communities need. However, there are concerns that this approach could result in spending on infrastructure such as roads, schools, and doctors' surgeries being reduced as the new levy can be spent on a wider array of things such as affordable housing and local council services. To help ensure that development continues to help fund essential infrastructure delivery, the County Council Network (CCN) has argued that the Government should allocate a certain portion of infrastructure levy receipts directly to county councils. The outcome of the consultation is awaited.

7. Highways and Transport

7.1 This section sets out a range of national and local developments impacting on transport planning and infrastructure in the county, encompassing highways maintenance, road safety, the refresh of the Local Transport Plan and planned improvements to local public transport, roads and measures to support transport decarbonisation.

Highways Maintenance

7.2 The new contract for highways and infrastructure services in East Sussex went live on 1 May 2023. The contract, valued at £297m, will run for an initial seven years, with an option to extend to a maximum of 14 years – worth up to £730m. Balfour Beatty Living Places will be responsible for maintaining the county’s roads, pavements, drainage, street lights, traffic lights, highway structures and bridges in line with the County Council’s asset management policies and investigatory levels. They will also provide winter gritting across the county and deliver highway improvement and maintenance schemes.

7.3 Highways capital investment was increased by £3.1m annually, in addition to

a £5.8m one-off contribution, as part of the 2022/23 RPPR process to reflect the importance of our road network and its role in providing connectivity for our businesses and communities. The additional £5.8m in addition to the existing annual capital maintenance programme provided for additional highway improvement works including further patching, lines and road markings, repairs to pavements and repair or replacement of road signs. These works have a visible positive impact for all road users. Proposals for further investment in highways maintenance in 2023/24 are being considered by Cabinet, in light of the significant increase in potholes and failures on the network caused by poor weather conditions experienced across the county during the winter.

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

7.4 In September 2022, the Department for Transport (DfT) confirmed that ESCC would receive its indicative allocation of £41.4m in BSIP funding. The majority of the capital funding element was specifically to deliver bus priority measures by the end of financial year 2024/25. In October 2022, the Council commenced a feasibility, design and review study across three packages of bus priority measures focussed on South Wealden to Eastbourne, Eastbourne Town, and Seahaven Towns. The progression of the above schemes will be dependent on the outcomes of the feasibility study and then consultation and further design stages. Funding will come from BSIP capital allocation of £18.5m for bus priority measures.

Refresh of the Local Transport Plan

7.5 The [East Sussex Local Transport Plan](#) (LTP) sets out our strategy and policies for how we plan to invest in improving transport and maintaining the roads in the county to meet transport needs. Our current LTP covers 2011 to 2026, but it will be updated to reflect considerable recent changes in national, regional and local policy related to the environment, health and economy. The updated plan will influence how we plan and deliver transport in East Sussex in the future and support the Council's response to the climate emergency. The Government is expected to publish guidance on updating LTPs imminently and our Plan will need to align with this. There is an expectation that local authorities will have an updated plan in place by summer 2024.

7.6 It is proposed to consult on a draft strategy during autumn 2023, including bespoke consultation activities with specific groups, for example young people and the business sector, alongside a public consultation. Formal approval of the Plan will be sought in early 2024.

Transport decarbonisation

7.7 Transport is now the greatest contributor to carbon emissions in East Sussex, and supporting this area will be a major part of carbon reduction within the county. The Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan, 'Decarbonising Transport: a Better, Greener Britain' was published in July 2021. This sets out the pathway to net zero transport in the UK, the wider benefits of net zero transport and the principles that underpin their approach to delivering net zero transport. The Transport Decarbonisation Plan is influencing our own transport policies and plans for the county through the current update to the East Sussex LTP. To tackle transport related emissions, we will need to consider how we can use our cars less, how we move away from planning for vehicles to planning for businesses, people, and places more in the future; and ensure active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport become the preferred choice for short journeys or part of longer journeys.

7.8 To complement our LTP, our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, emerging Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy, Bus Service Improvement Plan as well as our Enhanced Bus Partnership will support the transport decarbonisation agenda at a local level.

Active travel

7.9 Active Travel England (ATE) is a new Government executive agency established to support walking, wheeling, and cycling, sponsored by the DfT. ATE is responsible for:

- allocating and awarding active travel funding
- enforcement of new cycling design guidance
- providing scheme design and implementation advice alongside scheme inspection
- monitoring local authority performance on active travel – including annual review of a local authority self-assessed active travel grade.

7.10 In January 2023, we secured £180,443 of Capability revenue funding. This will fund the development of pipeline schemes for future capital funding bids, including three school streets schemes, an active travel neighbourhood scheme and a potential segregated cycle lane, which will involve collaborative and co-design activities with communities and learning opportunities in relation to active travel.

National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy and local e-vehicle charging

7.11 The Council has made a commitment to develop a strategy to support the growing demand and needs of Electric Vehicles (EV) users within East Sussex. To understand the scope of what is required, ESCC has worked closely with external consultants, other public organisations within the county, and with district and borough councils. This work has highlighted the key areas and locations that will require EV infrastructure, as well as delivery challenges and funding gaps.

7.12 In March 2023, the sum of £4.4m was provisionally allocated to the Council under the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund. This funding will help to scale up the delivery of local charge points, enabling more residents, especially those without off-street parking, to switch to EVs. The ability to charge at or close to home is a major concern to many EV users and this will feature as main priority within the strategy. Further scope within the LEVI grant now allows consideration of sites that will support, tourism, taxis, and commercial vehicles, and work continues to identify suitable locations for inclusion. ESCC has submitted the Expression of Interest to access this funding in late May, requesting funding in 2023/24 in preference to being allocated funds later in 2024/25.

Road Safety

7.13 The statutory duty placed on us, and the expectation of our residents, in terms of road safety is significant. To manage this, we have a range of measures and programmes designed to fulfil the wide-ranging pressures we face, including an annual assessment of crashes occurring on our road network to inform prioritisation of road safety schemes as part of the Local Safety Scheme or Route Study work. We also receive many requests for small scale road safety improvements to be made which do not meet the requirements to be considered through the above routes. To address these concerns, £750,000 has been allocated from the Community Match underspend to deliver community focused road safety interventions. Selected schemes will address identified road safety concerns, and will be identified by considering a range of issues and specific site characteristics, weighted to define their relative priority. Current funding will enable a three-year programme of works to be delivered. Approval has also been given for any future underspends from the Community Match allocation to be allocated to support further community focused schemes.

7.14 £500,000 has also been approved by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment to undertake a Speed Management Programme. The funding will be split over the next three years with additional ongoing funding identified within future Capital Programmes. As part of the Speed Management Programme, a review will identify lengths of the main road network that would benefit from a reduced speed limit. It will also check that existing speed limits are effective and producing the desired reductions in vehicle speeds

using available speed data and vehicle telematics. The review will also identify sites of greatest need and local concern where proven traffic management measures would have a positive effect and enhance the effectiveness of the speed limit. Over the next three years, the project will see more than 25 stretches of road benefit from speed limit reductions or measures that will increase the effectiveness of existing speed limits.

7.15 Using initial one-off funding from East Sussex Public Health, and working with the Behavioural Insights Team and partners from Sussex Safer Roads Partnership, we launched an innovative programme to understand the causes of serious collisions and trial interventions to help reduce the number of people being killed or seriously injured on East Sussex roads. Further funding has now been secured from Public Health to enable these trials to continue. We are currently working up potential interventions, aimed at our identified priority groups, that can be implemented through a randomised control trial. The outcome of these trials will be fully evaluated to improve our understanding of how to use behavioural science techniques to target those most at risk.

Transport for the South East (TfSE) Strategic Investment Plan

7.16 [TfSE's Strategic Investment Plan](#) (SIP) provides a framework for delivering their 2020 Transport Strategy by outlining the structure for investment in strategic transport infrastructure, services, and regulatory interventions up to 2050. Underpinned by a robust evidence base, the SIP as a regional plan is intended to provide advice to the Secretary of State for Transport on the investment priorities across the TfSE geography.

7.17 The SIP outlines two types of investment packages:

- global policy interventions of national regulatory and policy activities such as adoption of zero emission technologies to decarbonise transport; road user charging; and promotion of mobility methods of travel, which would be delivered across the South East; and
- place-based packages of multi modal (highways, rail, mass transit/bus, active travel) interventions within three area packages which cover parts of East Sussex:
 - Solent and Sussex Coast: A27/A259 and Coastway rail corridors
 - London - Sussex Coast: M23/A23, A22, A26 and A272, and Brighton Mainline, Uckfield rail corridors
 - Kent, Medway and East Sussex: A21, A259 east of Hastings and Marshlink rail corridors

7.18 Following agreement from the Partnership Board, the £45bn SIP has been submitted to the DfT with a request that it be considered as future investment decisions are made.

Exceat Bridge replacement

7.19 In October 2021, ESCC was awarded £7.9m funding from the Government's Levelling Up Fund to replace the Exceat Bridge. The scheme will be sensitively designed to reflect the outstanding natural landscape and to protect the unique nature of the area and ensure that the work we do not only benefits those using the road, but also protects and enhances this ecologically sensitive location. In December 2022, planning permission was granted from the South Downs National Park Authority with conditions in place to protect the natural landscape. Final detailed designs for the bridge are being completed along with negotiations for the required areas of land. Construction is expected to start at the beginning of 2024 and is expected to take between one and two years.

National Highways Programmes – A27 and A21

7.20 In 2020, Government published its second Roads Investment Strategy (RIS2), covering the period 2020 – 2025. RIS2 identifies that further work will be undertaken on developing proposals for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate as a potential pipeline scheme for construction between 2025 and 2030. This further work, managed by National Highways (NH - formerly Highways England), has commenced but is at an early stage.

7.21 RIS2 also included the development of a package of road safety improvements for the A21 corridor north of Hastings. NH continues work on the development of the proposed safety package study for the A21 which will be rolled out over the life of RIS2. While not included in the current RIS, we will continue to lobby and make the case to Government, including through TfSE, for improvements to the Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst, Flimwell and Hurst Green sections of the A21 in a future RIS.

Rail developments

7.22 Government has confirmed its intention to create a new public body, Great British Railways (GBR), which will run and plan the network, own the rail infrastructure, procure passenger services, and set and collect most fares and timetables. GBR is currently in shadow format, due to come into effect by autumn 2024, subject to legislation being progressed. The transfer of the current powers held by the Secretary of State for Transport to GBR will enable private partners to be contracted to operate trains, with franchising being replaced by Passenger Service Contracts. Fares and tickets will be simplified, including standardising mobile and online ticketing and flexible season tickets, and there will be better integration of rail with buses and cycling, as well as other forms of transport. It is important that we continue to be involved in future processes associated with the delivery of the Plan for Rail and engage with GBR to ensure that these changes benefit our residents, those visiting East Sussex, and businesses operating in and out of the county.

7.23 Following the Kent and East Sussex Rail Connectivity study, in May 2021 a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) which set out the strategic case for four options (two in East Sussex) to potentially improve rail connectivity to the Kent and East Sussex coast was submitted to Government. A formal response has yet to be received, however the scheme has been included in the Kent, Medway and East Sussex package of interventions in the TfSE Strategic Investment Plan. In the meantime, local MPs and the local authorities in East Sussex and Kent are working collaboratively to explore opportunities to lever in private sector finance or investment to fund the delivery of the rail schemes identified.

8. Economy

8.1 The following sections outline recent developments in Government policy and investment programmes that will affect the support we provide, with partners, to drive sustainable local economic growth in future. There will be challenges and limitations in the scope and scale of the delivery of some of this support in future, arising from reduced availability of growth funding for the county, as detailed in the sections below.

Supporting the local economy

8.2 The economic climate facing businesses across the UK, and locally in East Sussex, is one of unprecedented challenges. Following nearly 3 years of disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the changes to the UK's trading relationship with the EU, businesses must also now contend with the sharpest increase in costs for 40 years, high inflation, energy price instability, and record staff turnover. We will continue to monitor the situation and build a "pipeline" of interventions that can be put in place to support businesses with available resources.

8.3 The Team East Sussex (TES) Economy Recovery Plan (ERP), which was put in place to help businesses, people and communities recover from Covid, has reached its natural conclusion. We are currently working with partners to produce an Economic Insight Analysis which will set out the evidence base for a range of interventions that will have most impact on the economy, particularly in relation to productivity, innovation and pre-scale up businesses. This will inform a new Growth Strategy for the county to support longer term recovery and growth.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

8.4 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were introduced across England in 2011 as partnerships between councils, businesses and other stakeholders, focussed on driving productivity and job creation. East Sussex is part of the South East LEP (SELEP), which also includes Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. In early 2022, the Government set out the “pathway to devolution”, where LEP functions were to be integrated into local democratic institutions across the country in a phased way by 2030. In the 2023 Spring budget the Government announced that it is now minded to end core funding for LEPs from April 2024 and integrate LEP functions into local government.

8.5 Following this announcement, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) launched an eight-week information gathering exercise to gain a fuller understanding of the impacts of their proposal if it is taken forward. DLUHC is expected to notify LEPs and all local and combined authorities of the outcome by summer 2023. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that the SELEP Delivery Plan for this year (2023/24) will need to include some immediate actions to support local areas in their moves toward devolution of these roles, functions and responsibilities. We know that many of SELEP’s existing economic development functions will need to be worked into devolved frameworks, but the actual activities to be devolved, and precisely where they should be devolved to, are all yet to be determined, and so must form the basis of the discussions. We have established a local authority group to consider the implications of both the outcome of the consultation and emerging devolution proposals in Essex.

National economic investment programmes

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

8.6 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is the Government's domestic replacement for the European Structural and Investment Fund Programme (ESIF) in which the UK will continue to participate until the end of 2023. The Government launched the prospectus for the new UKSPF programme in 2022 with a focus on three main investment themes: Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, and People and Skills. Each district and borough council in East Sussex has been allocated £1m, with the exception of Wealden District Council which has been allocated £1.2m, with each allocation covering a three year period from April 2022 – March 2025, giving a total allocation of £5.2m to East Sussex. For the limited UKSPF funding available, priorities have been determined by each borough and district authority against the three investment themes.

8.7 ESCC has been working with district and borough partners to develop and manage pan-East Sussex business support programmes and skills interventions. The business support programme has two strands: ‘Start’ will support new early-stage businesses in East Sussex that have registered within two years of receiving support, and ‘Specialise’ will allow businesses to access specialist advice and support from a pool of qualified and experienced consultants who are experts in their field. In terms of people and skills investment, Rother, Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden Councils are all contributing funding towards the delivery of a coordinated ‘Moving on Up’ programme, helping individuals in supported and temporary housing, and those furthest from the workplace, to access training, employability support and support into and in work.

Multiply programme

8.8 In April 2022, the Government also released details of the new UK-wide Multiply Programme (part of the UKSPF) worth £559m. The aim of the programme is to reach adults over 19 years old to improve their functional numeracy skills to a qualification at Level 2.

8.9 ESCC is responsible for managing the programme in East Sussex which has been allocated £2.5m over the three year period from April 2022 to March 2025. The programme has been launched with partners from Further Education, independent training providers, and our local voluntary and community sector who are commissioned to deliver a wide range of numeracy provision. Over a thousand residents will be supported in 2023/24 and in 2024/25.

Levelling Up Fund

8.10 Government announced its £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund (LUF) in 2021. This provides funding to invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities. The LUF addresses the three investment themes of transport, regeneration and town centre, and culture.

8.11 Each upper tier local authority has the right to submit one bid on transport investment throughout the lifetime of the LUF programme. ESCC's first round bid was successful, receiving just under £8m in June 2021 to deliver the replacement of the Exceat Bridge, as outlined above, linking two of our growth areas, Eastbourne and Newhaven, which are also within the highest priority areas for the LUF.

8.12 Additionally, the Government announced in October 2021 that both the Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council LUF first round bids were successful with £19.8m and £12.7m respectively awarded. The Eastbourne LUF bid included £4.8m towards the pedestrianisation of the Seaside Road to Grand Parade section of Terminus Road (Victoria Place) which forms part of the wider public realm and pedestrian improvements that have been delivered in the town centre in recent years. The Lewes bid focussed on Newhaven, with investment in Newhaven fisheries.

8.13 In January 2023, Rother District Council secured £19.2m from the second round of the LUF for the redevelopment of the De La Warr Pavilion, including investment in satellite infrastructure to involve communities in Bexhill who are not close to the seafront. The Government has indicated that a third round of LUF will be made available in 2023/24 and Hastings Borough Council is intending to work up a proposal for submission. Hastings and Rother will benefit from a share of the £400m LUF fund delivered through Levelling Up Partnerships (LUPs) which are expected to provide bespoke place-based regeneration throughout 2023/24 and 2024/25. ESCC will continue working with colleagues in Hastings and Rother as plans are developed to define the interventions and support the bidding process and successful implementation.

Skills

8.14 The Skills East Sussex (SES) board has agreed the following priorities for 2021-2030 and sector-based task groups are working to action plans to address these:

- ensuring national policy and funding supports the delivery of learning and skills in East Sussex;
- enabling our Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) establishments to recruit excellent educators with specialist technical knowledge;
- improving our digital skills and digital inclusion;
- upskilling our workforce to increase regional productivity;
- supporting the unemployed and unqualified; and
- developing skills and provision for a Net Zero future.

8.15 The impact of advances in technology and the move towards Net Zero are important considerations for skills in East Sussex. Skills East Sussex has commissioned 'Future Skills' research, in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies, to bring together feedback from over 300 local employers, alongside desk based research. The research will

help us better understand the impact of Net Zero, Artificial Intelligence, Digital/Technology, Brexit and the current economic challenges on the East Sussex economy and employment landscape. The findings will help our providers to plan future learning, and our employers to better understand the upskilling needs of their current workforce to support their businesses and the East Sussex economy.

8.16 The 2021 Skills for Jobs White Paper heralded the development of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), with Sussex Chamber of Commerce successfully applying to be one of eight national trailblazers. The LSIP is a collaboration with employers, education providers, local authorities and partners across Sussex, and builds on the successful model developed by SES and sector-based task groups. In 2023 the LSIP trailblazer is submitting a proposal to the DfE for a forward plan to support its future offers and development. This plan will shape the use of forthcoming Local Strategic Initiative Funding.

Culture and tourism

8.17 Several initiatives are progressing to help harness the potential of the visitor economy in the county. A south east consortium, led by Kent County Council and reaching from Essex to West Sussex, has secured one of six awards nationally to deliver the 'Create Growth Programme', a business support programme targeting pre-growth, intellectually property rich creative businesses with an appetite for growth through investor finance. The programme award of £1.275m sits alongside a £7m investment fund which is being delivered nationally and which south east creative businesses will be eligible to apply for.

8.18 The Turner Prize will be hosted in Eastbourne in 2023/24, and ESCC has worked with local partners to secure an additional £500,000 of funding from Arts Council England to deliver a £1m programme of activity to maximise the benefit of the prize for local young people, hospitality businesses and other tourist attractions.

8.19 The Sussex Visitor Economy Industry Group of leading business representatives has been established to advise the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative (ESCC, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council) on pan-Sussex tourism development. With UK Community Renewal Fund investment, the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative has supported the production of a prospectus for wine tourism which will be launched this year.

9. Environment and Climate Change

9.1 The following paragraphs detail the range of recent national commitments, strategies and legislation that impact the Council's work to deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation, and also to protect the local natural environment. It is also important to note that net zero is increasingly integrated into wider policy, for example in areas such as housing, transport and public procurement. Whilst the policy context below outlines the main recent developments, it is not an exhaustive list of every new policy that touches on climate change. Much national guidance or detail on plans for delivery is still awaited, including clear expectations on how central and local government will interact in delivery of net zero, and how several commitments made in the Environment Act are to be delivered. The level of funding allocated to delivering new national commitments may also be insufficient. We await further information on funding new burdens for ESCC arising from the Environment Act.

Climate change - national policy context

9.2 In 2021, the UK Government published its [Net Zero Strategy 'Build Back Greener'](#). This did not include any statutory responsibility for local authorities to reduce carbon emissions, but did set out commitments to:

- set clearer expectations for local places, clarify how the partnership with local government should work, and consider how action at national, regional, local, and community levels fit together;

- provide resources for local places to deliver stronger contributions to national net zero targets; and
- build local capacity and capability.

9.3 As the Net Zero Strategy indicates, local authorities are widely considered to have a key role in decarbonising services such as local transport, waste disposal, and public buildings. More broadly, local authorities are seen to have a key role to play in creating change amongst residents and businesses, via their investment and procurement decisions, planning and placemaking responsibilities, and by direct engagement with residents. In 2021, the National Audit Office reported that 91% of local authorities have adopted a commitment to decarbonise either their own activities, their local area, or both.

9.4 The 2022 US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU Green Industrial Plan have significantly changed the global landscape for net zero investment, ushering in significant state subsidies for net zero industries. The UK is expected to respond to these developments, most likely through the 2023 Autumn Statement.

'Mission Zero' Independent Review of Government Net Zero Policy

9.5 In 2022, the Government commissioned Chris Skidmore MP, a former Energy Minister, to undertake an independent review of the UK's net zero policies. The report, ['Mission Zero'](#), was published in January 2023 and contained 129 separate recommendations. A Government response was published in March 2023. Amongst other local actions, the review suggested a statutory duty for local authorities to take account of the UK's net zero targets, a recommendation rejected in the Government response.

Commitments in the Government response with relevance to county councils are:

- Establishing a set of principles for devolving net zero funds as part of wider devolution deals
- Exploring simplification of local net zero funding
- Supporting local capacity and capability building through the Local Net Zero Hubs
- Supporting skills and economic development through a Net Zero and Nature Workforce Action Plan (due in 2024) and a Net Zero Power and Networks Workforce Action Plan (timescale to be confirmed)

Local action on climate change

9.6 ESCC declared a climate emergency in 2019. The Council set a target of achieving carbon neutrality from its activities as soon as possible and in any event by 2050. This is in line with the updated target for the whole UK agreed by Parliament in 2019. Further to this, in 2020, ESCC committed to cutting its corporate carbon emissions by an average of 13% per year. In 2021, ESCC committed an additional £9.6m to help meet this reduction target up to March 2025. A new [Climate Emergency Plan](#) was approved earlier this year, covering the period 2023-25.

9.7 ESCC commissioned modelling work to identify the most cost effective options to reach net zero. Whilst this work identified potential 'quick wins', it also demonstrated the scale of the challenge. The cost for ESCC to get to net zero for building and transport emissions (scope 1 and 2) could be approximately £200m between now and 2050, largely due to the investment needed for decarbonising heat in buildings, including schools. A key area for ESCC is bidding for external funding to maximise the impact and reach of its resources.

9.8 Even if global warming can be limited to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, significant additional investment is likely to be needed in measures to adapt to the effects of climate change that are already locked in. Climate change adaptation refers to the adjustments we need to make in response to actual and expected climate change, to ensure that the Council can continue to operate effectively as the climate changes.

ESCC's Climate Emergency Plan commits us to:

- Assessing the Council's vulnerability to climate change
- Producing a climate risk register
- Developing a climate adaptation/ resilience strategy and programme
- Embedding climate adaptation into business-as-usual decision-making and risk management

9.9 In 2021, the Council worked with its partners on the East Sussex Environment Board to produce a [Climate Emergency Road Map](#) for the whole county, which was adopted by Team East Sussex in January 2022. The road map summarises many areas of work that the Council leads, or collaborates with partners on, to mitigate and adapt to climate change. These include programmes to support more walking, cycling and local bus services, address fuel poverty, support businesses in becoming more energy efficient, support residents to invest in renewable energy and to manage flood risk to homes and businesses. Progress on the county-wide Roadmap will continue to be driven by the Environment Board. A range of existing thematic partnerships will also continue to address climate change in East Sussex, including partnerships covering housing, waste, skills and local planning. ESCC has also recently completed a review with Community Energy South (CES) on ways to align the climate change objectives of the County Council and the network of community energy groups established in East Sussex. We also fund CES to deliver carbon literacy training in the community and recently submitted a bid with CES and UK Power Networks for funding from UK Innovate's Fast Followers programme to develop community energy plans.

Environment Act

9.10 The [Environment Act](#) received Royal Assent in November 2021 and the Government is now in the process of introducing secondary legislation, policy and guidance to implement elements of the Act. Many aspects of the Act will have implications for ESCC, but in some areas, the extent of these will not be fully understood until that secondary legislation, guidance and/or policy emerges.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

9.11 Under the Act ESCC will be a Responsible Authority for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). In broad terms, the LNRS will set a spatial strategy for how and where measures to achieve nature recovery will be achieved. It has been provisionally agreed that ESCC will work in partnership with West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and the Local Nature Partnership to prepare the evidence base and undertake the necessary stakeholder engagement for the preparation of LNRSs. This should ensure a degree of consistency between the two strategies that will eventually exist – one for West Sussex and one for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Biodiversity

9.12 Related to the production of the LNRS is the mandating, through the Environment Act, of a requirement for new developments to deliver a minimum of a 10% gain in biodiversity, known as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Following consultations in November 2021 and September 2022, DEFRA published an updated metric and associated guidance in March 2023. Whilst this indicates how Government expects BNG to be implemented, secondary legislation and guidance, along with a national site register for off-site BNG, is still awaited. A phased approach to the implementation of BNG is due to commence in autumn 2023. Whilst the preference will be for the gain to be delivered on development sites (in line with the mitigation hierarchy), there will be occasions where off-site gain is necessary, and the LNRS will be used to guide this to some extent. Given delays to the commencement of the LNRS process, they are unlikely to be in place before BNG becomes mandatory for major developments in November 2023 (and for minors in April

2024). DEFRA has acknowledged that assessing and monitoring the implementation of BNG will create additional resourcing pressures on planning authorities. Clarity over additional burdens funding should be available by autumn 2023. In the meantime, some seed funding has been made available to all local planning authorities to prepare for mandatory BNG.

9.13 The Environment Act also strengthens the existing Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, requiring all public authorities to consider what action they can take to further the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, and to report on progress against that duty. The strengthened duty came into force in January 2023, and the first Biodiversity Report must be published no later than three years after that date, with subsequent reports published every five years. Whilst some indications of mandatory content have been provided, further guidance is awaited from DEFRA. Additional funding for this duty should be provided to planning authorities by autumn 2023.

Environmental Improvement Plan

9.14 The Environment Act contained a commitment to refresh the 25 year Environment Plan every five years. The first refresh took place in early 2023, via the release of a new Environmental Improvement Plan. Most of the actions outlined in the plan are part of existing plans and strategies, however, the plan made new commitments to:

- set legally binding targets for air pollutants;
- publish an air quality strategy with clear guidance to local authorities on embedding action into their wider functions; and
- launch a Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme, initially by funding several pioneering authorities.

Waste provisions

9.15 The Environment Act also has significant consequences for ESCC in its role as Waste Disposal Authority. Changes to waste management in the county will include the provision of weekly food waste collections, the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme and the introduction of extended producer responsibility for packaging. These changes will impact ESCC's waste contracts. They are likely to include the need to modify transfer stations and introduce changes to the volumes and type of recycling materials. There are still significant unknowns in respect of these changes, including how certain elements will be funded, with a Government announcement expected imminently.

Flood risk management

9.16 The Government has stated that it wishes to implement this legislation over the next 12-18 months. It would see Lead Local Flood Authorities (such as ESCC) take on responsibility for the approval, adoption and maintenance of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) constructed as part of new developments. This will have significant implications for the Council's Flood Risk Management team, as currently our role is restricted to commenting on proposed drainage schemes at the design stage. Consultation on secondary legislation, new burdens assessments, and matters such as transitional arrangements is expected later this year. Although there will clearly be resource and budget implications for the Council these are unclear until further detail emerges.

10. Supporting Services

10.1 The below section provides updates on key local and national developments for ESCC's supporting services. Local priorities are to deliver the implementation phase of the Modernising Back Office Systems programme; deliver measures in response to workforce challenges; continue delivery of the Council's Property Asset Management Plan including

carbon reductions; and further develop digital approaches to support organisational resilience. Key national developments include public procurement and audit reforms.

Modernising Back Office Systems Programme

10.2 The Modernising Back Office Systems (MBOS) Programme was established to replace the Council's core finance and Human Resources (HR) systems. The current system, SAP, will no longer be supported by the supplier beyond 2027. Replacing a system originally implemented over 15 years ago provides opportunities to take advantage of new technology which is better able to support an agile and flexible workforce, and provide easily accessible data and insight to support management decision making.

10.3 Following an extensive and robust procurement process, Oracle Fusion was selected as the new software platform, and Infosys as the implementation partner. The replacement system will deliver clear benefits, including a better user experience, undertaking transactional activity (freeing staff up to focus on more complex and value-added advice), and better availability of data and management reporting.

10.4 The programme has now moved to its implementation phase, with governance and resourcing having been refreshed to ensure that it is fit for purpose for a complex implementation, involving the replacement of the organisation's critical finance, HR, recruitment, and procurement systems.

Workforce Challenges

10.5 In common with many employers, we are experiencing significant recruitment and retention challenges as a result of the current national labour market conditions and cost of living pressures. The national labour market is the tightest it has been for 50 years with an increase in the 'participation gap', with more people of working age either retiring or moving into education. Locally, there are particular challenges in front line social care roles (qualified and unqualified) and some of our technical and professional roles such as legal services and engineering. The position is exacerbated in our more rural locations with recruitment in these areas being especially difficult. There is evidence to show that this tight labour market is putting pressure on pay levels.

10.6 The Council has put in place a number of strategies to respond to these pressures. A new employer recruitment brand – We Choose East Sussex – has been developed and launched, aimed at promoting the Council as a high quality employer of choice. Alongside this new brand, targeted recruitment and retention strategies have been put in place including a new 'Refer a Friend' scheme, an updated relocation policy, employee loans policy, salary sacrifice schemes and financial wellbeing resources.

10.7 As well as seeking to attract experienced individuals, we are also utilising approaches such as apprenticeships, traineeships and intern arrangements as a way of bringing new talent into the Council. Our experiences to date have identified the need to support some groups to become 'work ready', and additional one-off funding provided by Cabinet has funded a new Pre-Employment Co-ordinator post which has a specific responsibility for establishing clear pathways for job seekers to access opportunities within the Council. Being a diverse and inclusive place to work further supports our recruitment and retention aims.

10.8 Retention of or existing workforce is also a key aim. We are committed to supporting our staff with continuous professional development and creating an environment where staff are encouraged to learn and grow. In line with this, two new leadership development initiatives were launched during 2022/23: the 'Ladder to Leadership' programme and Heads of Service masterclass programme. Both initiatives were well received and evaluations are now taking place in order to further enhance and develop these programmes for the future.

We continue to develop our extensive wellbeing offer to support our staff to remain healthy and well, both in and out of work.

Property Asset Management

10.9 The Council's Asset Management Plan 2020-2025 contains an action plan to ensure operational assets are used efficiently, and a programmed approach to asset disposal has been established. There is increasing focus on ensuring the Council's assets are optimally utilised and continue to reduce their carbon and physical footprint. This includes reviewing the use of our corporate estate, including County Hall, and rationalising use where possible.

10.10 Capital investment has been targeted to improve environmental sustainability as part of the Council's net zero commitment, as well as ensuring that property assets support all Council objectives and services. Property policies are being updated to increase support for communities including common asset transfer and joint use leisure assets.

Procurement Bill

10.11 The Procurement Bill currently working its way through Parliament is expected to receive Royal Assent in July 2023. The Bill is the foundation for the Government's Transforming Public Procurement regime, which will see the biggest change to the Procurement Regulations in nearly 30 years. The Government has committed to providing a six month implementation period, which will commence once secondary legislation has been agreed. Current timescales predict that procurement will be required to be fully compliant with the regulations from July 2024, although this is dependent on the Bill passing prior to Parliament's summer recess.

10.12 The impact on procurement teams will be significant over the next two years. In preparation for the new regulations, work is required to understand existing processes, systems, people, and planned procurement activity that will be impacted. By starting planning now, we can ensure we are in the best position when the new regulations come into force. An extensive Learning and Development package will be rolled out by the Cabinet Office which will require all procurement practitioners to complete a minimum of 10 hours of training and an advanced course which will consist of three days for expert practitioners. The resource implications of the planning, training, and implementation will have a significant impact on the available resources of the procurement team.

10.13 The Cabinet Office has also confirmed that a revised National Procurement Policy Statement will be released that will align with the new regulations and continue to support our approach to Social Value and Sustainable Procurement. The onus will be on procurement professionals to take advantage of the flexibility and apply their commercial skills, whilst also aligning with local and national priorities as set out in the National Procurement Policy Statement. During the implementation period there are likely to be additional costs to develop new policies and implement the changes, with pressures around resourcing and training to ensure that Orbis Procurement is confident and compliant in delivering under the new regulations.

National Audit Issues

10.14 The challenges with the delivery of local authority audits continue, with the National Audit Office reporting that auditors were only able to give opinions on 12% of local government bodies' 2021/22 financial statements by the statutory publication deadline of 30 November 2022. This compares to 9% of opinions for the 2020/21 statements when the deadline was earlier, on 30 September 2021. This remains a significant reduction on the 97% achieved for 2015/16. Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) reports that 632 audits remain outstanding. This is the case for ESCC, where the audits of 2020/21 and 2021/22 accounts remain unclosed. The accounts for 2022/23 have been published

[\(Statement of Accounts | East Sussex County Council\)](#) and are open for public inspection. It is expected that Grant Thornton will start their audit of the accounts in July 2023.

10.15 The challenge of finding sufficient staff within audit teams and heightened regulatory expectations, particularly with regard to Property, Plant and Equipment and pension valuations, is adding to these pressures. The PSAA procurement of local authority external auditors for five years, from 2023/24, focused on encouraging new audit firms into the market and a more sustainable supply. This resulted in audit fees increasing by an average of 150%. The Government has promised £45m over the three years from 2022/23 to support additional audit and financial reporting costs. The Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA), which is being set up to replace the Financial Reporting Council, will become the new system leader for external audit in 2024, at the earliest.

10.16 The CIPFA 2022 Position Statement for Audit Committees set out principles that it expects all local government bodies to strive to adopt, including the inclusion of at least two independent members of the committee, as well as undertaking a self-assessment of committee effectiveness.

Digital development

10.17 Developments in process automation, chatbot technology and artificial intelligence (AI) present a variety of opportunities to ESCC to support organisational capacity and resilience. The rapid progression of AI-enabled solutions means that expectations of ESCC service recipients are likely to evolve as well as the variety of technical solutions that may become available.

10.18 Whilst there would be a requirement for investment in establishing the prerequisite data architecture and technology infrastructure, and skilled resources in this area, it does present an opportunity to innovate in service provision to provide a more efficient and better service to users or to increase organisational resilience.