

National and Local Policy Outlook 2024

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 2025/26 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. With a general election imminent, there is uncertainty about the general direction of government policy beyond this time, including which current priorities and policies would be upheld by any new administration. There is potential for rapid policy shifts post-election which we would need to respond to, both in terms of immediate impacts and implications for future planning. The position on key national reforms in major service areas experiencing significant pressures, such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services, will also need to be clarified, although it is likely that progress in these areas will continue to be more limited than we would want in the short term.

1.3. 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.

1.4. 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.

National political context

2.2 There is significant policy uncertainty looking forward due to the general election to be held on 4 July 2024. The commitments already set out in political parties' manifestos make clear that the election holds potential for significant policy change affecting ESCC services and the county more broadly. Once the outcome of the election is known, we will analyse in more detail the implications of relevant policy positions for the Council. The King's Speech on 17 July 2024 will set out the post-election Government's initial legislative and policy priorities.

National economic outlook

2.3 Following weaker than expected Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the fourth quarter of 2023, the UK economy had experienced two successive quarters of falling output, meeting the definition of a technical recession. However, in the first quarter of 2024 the UK economy grew by 0.6% and came out of recession, although growth is still expected to remain weak. In April 2024 the International Monetary Fund downgraded its forecasts for UK GDP growth, now projecting growth of 0.5% in 2024 and 1.5% in 2025. Following an extended period of excessively high inflation, Consumer Price Index inflation has fallen more sharply than had been forecast by the OBR in November 2023. This is largely because of falling gas and electricity prices as a result of a drop in the energy price cap. In April 2024, Consumer Price Index inflation stood at 2.3%, the lowest level since September 2021, and the OBR forecasts that quarterly inflation should fall to the Bank of England target of 2% in the second quarter of 2024. In response, the Bank of England has maintained interest rates at 5.25% since August 2023, with cuts to the base rate considered likely in coming months.

2.4 Inflation falling faster than expected also led the OBR to improve its forecast for living standards, with real household disposable income per person set to recover to its pre-pandemic peak by 2025-26, two years earlier than its November 2023 forecast. However, this follows historic falls in living standards in 2022-23 which saw sharp increases in the cost of living being experienced by residents and businesses, and pressures still remain. In light of this, the Government announced in the Spring Budget the extension of the Household Support Fund for a further six months until September 2024.

2.5 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 20.4% below the England level in 2021 (£30.97 per hour, against £38.91 per hour in England). The unemployment rate for March 2024 was 3.5% for East Sussex, lower than the national average of 3.9%, but above the regional average of 3.0%. The youth unemployment rate (those 18-24 claiming unemployment related benefits) was 6.1%, higher than the England rate of 5.2%, 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 10.6-10.13.

Local government finance

2.6 The outlook for local government funding remains unclear and very challenging. Funding that ESCC will receive from central Government between 2025/26 – 2027/28 is yet to be confirmed. The timing of the forthcoming general election, earlier than anticipated, means that there may be more time for any incoming Government to seek to understand and address Local Government funding issues. However, the likelihood of another one year financial settlement for 2025/26 remains high given the time needed to complete a full Spending Review post-election. Long awaited reform to the system of local government funding has been deferred beyond the election and both the timing and nature of any proposed reforms remain unclear, although it is likely that a post-election government would struggle to implement any significant funding reforms within the current medium term financial plan period.

2.7 In recent Budget Statements the Chancellor indicated that the Government's focus was on driving economic growth and reducing taxation, rather than increasing spending on public services. There has been no change in the overall planned increase in Government department spending limits of 1% in real terms. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates this would result in real-terms cuts in funding for unprotected budgets in the years ahead, which includes most of local government. Recent commitments by political parties to increase defence spending in response to increasing global conflict will place further pressure on the public purse.

2.8 At a local level, key risks for the Council continue to be growth in demand and complexity in children's and adults' social care and special educational needs and disability. The resulting increases in costs are largely outside of local control, particularly given market conditions in these sectors and the impact of Government-determined increases to the National Living Wage. Combined with increased costs across other services, and the uncertain impact of national reforms, we can expect to see ongoing significant and sustained pressures on services and budgets which will impact on our medium term financial plan and ability to meet needs.

2.9 The ongoing impact of cost of living pressures and Covid legacy will continue to play out both in demand for services and in the income we receive. 2023/24 saw the level of debt continue to rise, particularly for Adult Social Care contributions, and it is expected that this trend will continue in 2024/25. Ongoing impacts on the collection of business rates and council tax continue to be fully assessed, as do the impact of recent changes to district and borough Council Tax Reduction Schemes and the potential for increased income from their new ability to apply Council Tax to second homes.

2.10 For the Capital Programme, there remain challenges in the supply chain for materials and price pressures within existing contracts. Changes to the Infrastructure Levy have added a level of uncertainty to the value of future developer contributions, which remain an important

funding stream for the programme. The challenging revenue budget position for 2024/25 required the capital programme to be reviewed to minimise the borrowing costs of the overall programme within Treasury Management and the revenue budget. The review reduced and re-profiled programmes and schemes over the 10 year programme. Further review will be required in light of the significant financial gap over the medium term, as the level of investment in assets that support the objectives of the Council Plan must be considered in the context of its impact on the revenue budget and wider Council financial position.

2.11 A lack of sufficient Government funding to address pressures in social care, instead asking councils to use reserves to mitigate pressures, means that we are using significant reserves to balance the budget for 2024/25, which will constrain the Council's ability to use reserves to manage future financial risk. Furthermore, the Council has had to abandon its usual approach of maintaining reserves to help future proof Council services from unforeseen risks. While the Council's reserves have been applied within a robust reserve policy, the Council will need to instigate work to identify a range of actions that it will need to take to set a balanced budget for 2025/26, without the need to draw further on reserves.

Productivity

2.12 The Government has set a target of 0.5% annual productivity improvements in the public sector and committed £4.2bn of funding (primarily for the NHS) to a Public Sector Productivity Programme intended to start to deliver the next phase of reform of public services. Relevant government departments will develop detailed productivity plans over the coming months ahead of the next Spending Review.

2.13 As part of the final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25, additional funding of £500m nationally (£5.4m for ESCC) was provided to support the delivery of social care. This additional funding came with an expectation that local authorities would produce productivity plans for submission to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by July 2024. A Long Term Sustainability Panel, made up of sector representatives and technology and transformation experts, is to be established from summer 2024 to review common themes and evidence arising from the plans and to consider national policy implications, the role of Government in supporting change and the role of the sector itself, including how it can achieve further productivity gains.

Devolution and Levelling Up

2.14 The Levelling Up agenda, which aims to address disparities in economic prosperity and quality of health across the UK, has remained a focus for the Government. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 contains a number of key reforms, including a system of brownfield-first development; the introduction of joint Spatial Development Strategies; reduced 'top down' housing targets; streamlining the local plan process; a new Infrastructure Levy; and measures to deliver on plans for increased devolution in England.

2.15 Devolution has remained central to the Levelling Up agenda. The Government has maintained its commitment to agreeing a devolution deal with any area of the country that wants one by 2030. A number of further deals have been published by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which are at Level 2 and Level 3 of the Devolution Framework as set out in the Levelling Up White Paper. Level 3 involves adopting a directly elected mayor or leader, although in some areas this has been met with local resistance. In addition, the Government has continued to progress two 'trailblazer' deeper devolution deals with the combined authorities of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, intended to be a blueprint for deeper devolution across the rest of England.

2.16 ESCC will continue to monitor how the various devolution deals progress to better understand the opportunities and risks associated with them, and to review future government policy in this area following the general election.

Updated inspection regime

2.17 In 2023 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) began assessing local authority Adult Social Care departments on how they are discharging their duties under the Care Act 2014. The CQC plans to assess all authorities by 2026. We anticipate that our Adult Social Care services are likely to be assessed by April 2025. In preparation for this, the department has undertaken a peer review with the Local Government Association and will be responding to the findings from this review to clarify our strengths and areas for development. Our response, as well as preparations for CQC assurance, will be guided by our departmental priorities (outlined in the Adult Social Care and Public Health section below) and the four CQC assurance themes: working with people; providing support; ensuring safety within the system; and leadership.

2.18 Our Children's Services Department was inspected by Ofsted under the framework and evaluation schedule for Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), which focuses on children's social care services, in December 2023. Our services were judged to be 'good' overall and 'outstanding' for the experiences and progress of children in care. The post-inspection action plan, agreed in response to the areas for improvement identified, has been shared with Ofsted and actions will continue to be taken forward to further develop our services.

2.19 Ofsted and CQC's new joint framework for inspecting provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) took effect from January 2023. The new framework 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 also includes an evaluation of commissioning and oversight arrangements for children and young people in alternative provision, something the previous framework did not do. We await an Ofsted local area SEND inspection under this framework in due course. HM Inspectorate of Probation recently undertook an inspection of our youth justice services and we await the report and recommendations which will inform future service development.

Oflog

2.20 The [Office for Local Government](#) (Oflog), established in July 2023 to provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about local government performance, continues to develop. Oflog is currently part of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), although the Government committed in the Levelling Up White Paper that Oflog would ultimately be independent.

2.21 Oflog has published and consulted on its draft Corporate Plan 2024-2027 which outlines its purpose to:

- Inform - increasing understanding about data on the performance of local authorities;
- Warn - helping to identify authorities at risk of serious failure who have not already raised the alarm themselves; and
- Support - helping local authorities with organisational improvement.

2.22 Oflog will publish its final Corporate Plan later this year. Its business plan for 2024-2025 sets out key activities and objectives for the next year, including to publish more metrics on its local authority performance data explorer, develop the desk-based component of its new early

warning system, start conducting Early Warning Conversations with local authorities who may be at risk of failure, and establish where it can best add value in providing support to councils.

3. Adult Social Care and Public Health

3.1 Whilst major reforms to Adult Social Care (ASC) charging have been postponed until 2025, other national reforms have progressed which impact on how social care is delivered locally. Teams across the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) Department are continuing to respond to a range of national and local developments, set out in more detail in this section. 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, supporting the resilience of local communities and addressing threats to health is also covered here.

People at the Heart of Care

3.2 The Government's [Next steps to put People at the Heart of Care](#), published in 2023 as part of the [People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White Paper](#), sets out the latest key milestones for the national development of ASC. This includes:

- Funding local authorities to increase care capacity and the workforce, including volunteers;
- Introducing a new Care Certificate qualification as a baseline for care workers;
- Implementation of the digital skills passport for carers' training;
- New systems to share patient care data across settings;
- Improvement of national data collection and availability to increase personalisation in care;
- Using evidence on technologies that can improve safety and quality of care; and
- Assessment of all local authorities by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (see 2.17 above).

3.3 The ASCH Department has a number of work programmes that will support us to implement these national reforms including our workforce programme, work to maintain a sustainable care market, and work to optimise use of data and technology. As part of preparations for CQC assessment, and in response to our Local Government Association peer review, the following set of priorities for ASCH have been agreed for 2024/25, which align to our Adult Social Care Strategy: 'What Matters to You' and the Council's four priority outcomes:

- Prevention
- Waiting times
- Safeguarding
- Quality
- Value for money

Charging reforms

3.4 The major national reforms to adult social care charging (originally reported at State of the County 2022) have been postponed until 2025, and there remains some uncertainty about when or whether they will be rolled out. If implemented, the reforms pose a significant risk to ESCC in terms of affordability, in the absence of assurance that Government funding will increase to meet the associated costs. They would also pose considerable risks operationally, as the reforms would increase demand on ASCH assessment teams, which already face significant demands on their services. ASCH undertook some initial preparation for delivery of charging reforms, such as identifying where increases in workforce capacity would be needed to manage risks of increased demand on operational services. ASCH remains ready to further those preparations, as and when Government expectations about the timing and implementation of charging reform become clear.

ADASS roadmap and Social Care Future vision

3.5 The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) has published a [roadmap to reforming care and support in England](#) which sets out recommendations for improving and reforming adult social care over the short, medium, and long term future. Its 'agenda for action' for local authorities sets out proposed changes, including a shift towards co-producing plans, improvising assessments, developing digital tools, investing in community support, and improving work in care and support.

3.6 ADASS recognises that funding remains a significant barrier to the implementation of its vision and recommend that funding is used to stabilise and transform the sector. The report suggests other barriers can be tackled immediately, including setting attitudes at a leadership level, encouraging positive risk taking, and considering clients as people and not patients. ASCH will be using the roadmap to inform our departmental plans.

3.7 The ADASS roadmap also recommends that a shared vision for social care is achieved and the Social Care Future vision is adopted. We have adopted this as our vision where we want everyone in East Sussex to "live in the place we call home, with the people and things we love, in communities where we look out for each other, doing the things that matter to us" and has joined the national Social Care Future Community of Support.

3.8 Achieving this vision will be supported by work aligned to both our priorities for ASCH for 2024/25 and the six residents' priorities in our Adult Social Care Strategy: 'What Matters To You'. The learning from Social Care Future community will also help us deliver specific commitments in our local strategy.

National Care Workforce Pathway

3.9 The Government, through the [National Care Workforce Pathway](#), has outlined plans to improve the career prospects of the domestic care workforce through training, qualifications, and a clearer care career path. Included within the pathway are suggested learning opportunities to help the workforce develop knowledge and skills within a role or specific area of practice. As further parts of the pathway are launched, additional learning opportunities will provide the ASCH Workforce Board with an opportunity to build on existing priorities aimed at both recruitment and retention, ensuring our workforce is trained and responsive to the needs of East Sussex residents.

Local Workforce Strategy and Programme

3.10 Locally, the ASCH Workforce Programme is entering its third year. Recruitment continues to be a challenge nationally and locally and is the focus for one of the six projects within the programme. Our priorities for recruitment include finding new ways to appeal to diverse candidates, promoting opportunities through local colleges and careers fairs, and streamlining our application process. We will build on the recruitment of a new cohort of social workers and support others to undertake social work apprenticeships.

3.11 Other aspects of the ASCH Workforce Programme include the Wellbeing Project which is working with Brighton University to improve the musculoskeletal health and wellbeing of ASCH staff and reduce musculoskeletal related absence; the Social Justice in the Workforce project which has launched the Equality Allies network to enable discussion about inclusion and help colleagues improve practice and services; the Leadership and Management Project which has rewritten the ASCH supervision policy and will signpost supervisors to tools and resources to support effective supervision with staff; the Strategic Workforce Planning project which has provided ASCH with an improved understanding of variations in retention rates across ASCH;

and the Retention Project which is piloting new exit interview processes. A consultation with staff aged 55 and over will help shape the support we provide to help them remain working for longer.

3.12 These projects will improve how we use resources by adapting our support to staff through change of practice, rather than using additional funds.

Care Data Matters: a roadmap for better data for adult social care

3.13 [Care Data Matters: a roadmap for better data for adult social care](#), published in 2023, sets out the Government's plan for developing data collection and sharing across adult social care. This will be done by improving data collection across regions, increasing digitisation and data sharing to improve joined up working, and working in partnership to understand current gaps and data needs.

3.14 Locally, ASCH is working to develop new ways of reporting and baselining our performance in line with revised definitions of measures in the national Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework. Once national data is released in October 2024, we will benchmark these measures locally to understand our comparative performance.

3.15 The Council must start using new sources of data under the Client Level Data collection. ASCH has developed in house reporting for Client Level Data and will ensure our national measures align to new methodologies as well as the new dataset. Work will continue to improve data quality and develop further analysis and understanding of it.

Right Care, Right Person

3.16 [Right Care, Right Person](#) is a national partnership agreement between the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England, and the Police. It aims to reduce police callouts where another body is better placed to respond, such as those for mental health crises, welfare checks, and to people who do not attend medical appointments. Right Care, Right Person began a phased roll out in East Sussex from April 2024.

3.17 Right Care, Right Person could increase demand for Council services, including those within ASCH Operations, and safeguarding referrals. An ASCH action plan has been agreed to mitigate these risks including: continuing to engage with Sussex Police and partners to influence implementation; reviewing policies and procedures and establishing monitoring arrangements to measure the impact on ASCH; and informing independent sector providers of any developments.

Adult Social Care Strategy: What Matters To You

3.18 Following the launch of our [Adult Social Care Strategy: 'What Matters to You'](#), ASCH has developed an action plan with partners for 2024/25. The action plan addresses the 15 'We will' statements in the strategy as well as our commitment to deliver the six residents' priorities that emerged from engagement. The detailed action plan will inform key local policy and practice; consisting of 64 tasks led by 16 teams across ASCH. Monitoring of the strategy will take place quarterly and include actions to address findings from the strategy's Equality Impact Assessment. Twice yearly progress reports on the action plan will be prepared and disseminated widely. The plan is iterative and will be updated to inform future steps required to deliver the strategy beyond March 2025. To better understand the outcomes of our activity, we will be developing an evaluation framework to demonstrate the impact of the strategy across each priority area.

Prevention strategy

3.19 ASCH will develop a Prevention Strategy to focus specifically on work to help people be more proactive about their health and wellbeing and to improve or maintain their quality of life and independence. We will map existing activity that prevents, reduces, and delays the need for care and support to identify priorities to enhance our preventative activity. The Prevention Strategy will aim to strengthen asset-based approaches, integration with health and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, a systematic focus on prevention, evidence of impact, and innovation. Consequently, the strategy will help the Council and partners meet the needs and aspirations of a changing and aging population. The strategy, and activities that will result, will be co-produced with a range of stakeholders, including statutory partners, the VCSE, residents, and businesses.

ASC market

Market sustainability

3.20 The sustainability of the care market continues to be a significant issue nationally and locally. The Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) is intended to support local authorities to make tangible improvements to adult social care services, to build capacity and improve market sustainability. £5m of additional funding will be allocated to providers from the MSIF, meaning a total of £11m will be allocated in East Sussex to support sustainability of the adult social care market during 2024/25.

3.21 National and international economic conditions continue to increase the cost of providing services. Workforce capacity, and the ability to sustain capacity with overseas workers, is also a key factor for market sustainability. Government changes to the Skilled Worker Visa will restrict entry through skilled worker routes and restrict workers bringing dependents to the UK which may pose further workforce challenges; we will continue to review the impact of this change and care worker visa approvals more generally. The ASCH Market Support Team continues to work closely with local providers and the Care Quality Commission to support and strengthen the independent care and support market. The ASCH Supply Management Team will run the Market Oversight Panel, with support from across the department and NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board Clinical Quality Nurses, to ensure oversight of market quality, risks, and impacts on the wider market. The Supply Management Team will also co-ordinate and deliver support to providers in response to market pressures.

3.22 ASCH has updated our [Market Position Statement](#) which sets out our latest assessment on market supply and demand, our commissioning intentions, and the support available to providers. The statement is published on our website and will be updated regularly to help new, existing, and prospective providers understand the market context for East Sussex.

Net to Gross payments for care

3.23 ASCH currently pays residential and nursing home providers net of their client contribution towards the cost of care. We are exploring moving to paying gross, which would align our approach with neighbouring local authorities. It is anticipated that this change of policy would support providers, as the Council would take on the invoicing of clients and the risk of non-payment. This would create better sustainability for the market, as providers will not face the burden of securing payments for client contribution. It would also help ASCH to make placements with providers going forward, who may have been deterred from accepting ASCH clients and collecting client contributions on our behalf. However, it would increase budgetary risk to the Council, as we would hold client invoices and any resulting non-payment.

Improvements to our debt recovery process would be implemented to mitigate against this and to improve residents' understanding on how to pay for care and support.

Safeguarding Adults Board strategic plan 2024-27

3.24 The East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) has developed a refreshed Strategic Plan which sets out how the Board will seek to prevent abuse and neglect and how it will help and protect adults with care and support needs from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The updated Plan will be considered for agreement by the SAB in July.

3.25 The following strategic themes have been identified for 2024-2027:

- Leadership and partnership working
- Safeguarding policies and procedures
- Performance, quality and audit
- Prevention and engagement
- Organisational learning and workforce development

3.26 The SAB priorities proposed for 2024-2027 are:

- Self-neglect - Improve and develop multi agency working and practice
- Prevention and early intervention - Ensure unpaid carers have an understanding and awareness of adult safeguarding and what support they and the person they are care for can access
- Safeguarding and homelessness - Promote positive practice with professionals working at the interface of multiple exclusion homelessness and adult safeguarding

3.27 A key area of identified learning in many Sussex commissioned Safeguarding Adult Reviews is the need for more effective partnership working in order to protect the adult. Multi-agency working will be promoted and embedded within these priority areas of work over the next three years.

Housing

3.28 East Sussex is facing a shortage of affordable housing, and developments for all tenures are failing to keep pace with local housing needs. Housing is one of the key '[Building Blocks of Health](#)' (identified wider detriments to health) and where it is missing, there are complex and profound impacts on the whole system. Rising demand for homelessness services, particularly temporary accommodation, is placing significant financial and capacity pressures on local housing authorities and public sector services.

3.29 Partnership arrangements within the local housing sector in East Sussex have been refreshed and now comprise a multi-agency strategic group of the five local housing authorities (district and borough councils); housing providers; Public Health; the NHS; Adult Social Care; Children's Services; the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector; Probation; and representatives of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Homes England. The partnership will be developing a medium and longer term vision for the sector in East Sussex, including lobbying Government and ensuring housing specialisms are represented at local, regional and national partnerships and forums.

3.30 A Partnership Housing Strategy is being developed and is due to be adopted in autumn 2024. The strategy will provide a framework for cross-sector collaboration, supporting partners to make the best use of capacity, expertise, and resources within the sector. Emerging themes include supporting sustainable delivery of housing and accommodation, making the best use of

existing housing stock, reducing reliance on temporary accommodation, de-carbonisation of the housing stock, and healthy homes and communities. Whilst the strategy is being developed, the partnership will work on additional investment in homelessness prevention, development of a local retrofit strategy and preparing for new social housing reforms. The partnership will work with the Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex (SPACES) Programme to identify public sector assets which could be redeveloped to provide future accommodation, as well as funding opportunities to enable this. The partnership will also work with the NHS to improve hospital discharge and develop Integrated Community Teams.

3.31 The creation of a new Multiple and Compound Needs Board is providing oversight of a range of programmes which support housing needs, as well as preparing for the closure of grant funded activity which ceases in March 2025 and may lead to increased pressure on services. Grant funded activity includes the East Sussex Rough Sleeping Initiative and the pan-Sussex Changing Futures programme.

3.32 An evaluation of the Homelessness Prevention Programme, which supports people into employment and signposts to health and wellbeing support, will be evaluated to inform an invest to save approach beyond the current funding to December 2025.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy

3.33 ASCH's updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: *Inclusive by Design* sets out a framework for the actions we will take and the values we will be guided by. In 2024 we will be using the Local Government Association Diverse by Design self-assessment tool to help us track our strategy action plan and use metrics to evaluate the impact of those actions. By doing so, we will create indicators to track progress in improving equality, diversity and inclusion.

Health and Social Care Integration

National Health and Social Care Integration

3.34 Under the Health and Care Act 2022, 42 Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) in England have come into being. Nationally all ICSs will be working to build on their initial Joint Forward Plans (in Sussex this is known as the Shared Delivery Plan); set out the steps they will take to address the most significant causes of illness and disease and premature death; and improve the co-ordination of services to reflect the growing numbers of people with two or more long term conditions. This includes steps to:

- Expand evidenced-based approaches to population health;
- Join up care closer to home, including through integrated neighbourhood teams and other place-based arrangements;
- Integrate and streamline Urgent and Emergency Care pathways; and
- Drive improvements in productivity and operational effectiveness.

3.35 The Government is planning to publish a national Major Conditions Strategy which ICSs will be asked to take account of. The best model of delivery for each ICS will consider:

- Integrated neighbourhood teams to improve timely access to primary care and community services to deliver proactive care and avoid exacerbations of ill health and improve the quality of care for older people;
- Further development of place-based partnerships to deliver Joint Forward Plans through Health and Wellbeing Boards and working with wider partners; and
- Changes to commissioning, planning, and provider collaboratives.

Local Health and Social Care Integration

3.36 The Council plays a key role in the statutory arrangements for the Sussex ICS, with representation on the Integrated Care Board and the joint Integrated Care Partnership, which is known as the Sussex Health and Care Assembly (the Sussex Assembly). The Sussex Assembly is a statutory joint committee between ESCC, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and NHS Sussex.

3.37 The five year Sussex Integrated Care Strategy '*Improving Lives Together*' sets out our shared ambition for a healthier future for everyone in Sussex and three overarching strategic priorities:

- Developing a joined-up approach to neighbourhood delivery through the Integrated Community Teams (ICTs)
- Growing and supporting our health and care workforce
- Improving the use of digital technology

3.38 A supporting Shared Delivery Plan was agreed in June 2023, and both the Strategy and the Shared Delivery Plan build on our understanding of population health needs in East Sussex, outlined in the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Strategy '*Healthy Lives, Healthy People (2022-2027)*'. The Shared Delivery Plan will undergo a refresh and include delivery plans that reflect the Health and Wellbeing Board priorities of children and young people, mental health, integrated community teams, and improving health outcomes.

East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board and Partnership

3.39 We will be strengthening the way the Council strategically aligns partnership working around the Health and Wellbeing Board and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment within the Sussex ICS. This will be informed by the feedback from our recent Local Government Association Peer Reviews, in particular our role to facilitate strategic leadership to achieve best value out of collective resources. Expected changes within NHS Sussex system architecture will also be considered, such as new NHS provider collaboratives. Proposals will be developed for the Health and Wellbeing Board to phase in during 2024/25 and will be based on driving improvement through joint commissioning, integrated care and the development of integrated community teams.

Integrated Community Teams

3.40 A strategic social care and health integration priority is the development of integrated community teams that will be made up of professionals working together as a 'team of teams' across health, social care, housing, VCSE partners and local communities. A core offer will be agreed for all integrated community teams in Sussex to proactively care for the most complex needs and vulnerable people. It was agreed that our integrated community teams' footprints will align with borough and district boundaries, and [data and insight packs](#) will be used to inform and address health and care needs and inequalities in local communities.

3.41 Establishing integrated community teams will build on progress we have made in working with communities in East Sussex over recent years. Hastings will be our community 'frontrunner' area for developing the Integrated Community Team model, with frontline teams and services, and similar engagement will take place across Eastbourne, Lewes, Rother and Wealden in the first half of 2024/25. As part of this engagement, each area will identify specific challenges to test the new approach.

3.42 The approach will continue to be tested and refined over the time frame of the Improving Lives Together strategy and Shared Delivery Plan. The aim is that by 2028, integrated community teams will be fully established in East Sussex.

Hospital discharge funding and initiatives

3.43 Health and social care services have implemented Discharge to Assess (D2A)/Home First pathways to safely speed up discharges from hospital to assess people in their own homes or temporary bed. The Council and ICS partners will continue to participate in the national discharge frontrunner programme to collaborate and support improvements to avoid hospital admissions expedite discharges. East Sussex was allocated c£5m as part of the national Government Discharge Fund Grant for 2024/25. This fund will support ASCH to build additional adult social care and community based reablement capacity to reduce hospital discharge delays.

3.44 Locally, ASCH commissions D2A beds for East Sussex and will work with approved home care providers, use block hours, and work with the Joint Community Reablement Team to ensure timely discharges. ASCH will also continue to jointly commission the British Red Cross Assisted Discharge and Home from Hospital schemes.

3.45 At the request of NHS partners, ASCH's dedicated Hospital Discharge Team is returning to undertaking assessments in acute hospital settings and in the community. With additional support from discharge funding, ASCH has increased the number of assessment staff based in hospitals, including weekend discharge support through the Joint Community Reablement In-Reach Team at Conquest Hospital.

Public Health priorities

Reducing health inequalities

3.46 As a local authority, ESCC can influence many of the identified [Building Blocks of Health](#) which contribute to preventing death and ill health in East Sussex, and are often key drivers of health inequalities. These include access to services, education, work, social networks, tobacco and alcohol use, unhealthy food, and exercise. The Building Blocks of Health is a toolkit which aims to increase understanding of the role that wider determinants play in our health, as well as support to address them. Public Health will aim to maximise the positive impact we have on health inequalities through the promotion of a 'health-in-all-policies' approach across services delivered by the Council.

Smoking legislation

3.47 The [Tobacco and Vapes Bill](#), presented before the House of Commons in March 2024, proposed raising the age of sale for all tobacco products one year every year from 2027 onwards. This would mean that children who turn fifteen this year (2024) or younger would never be able to purchase cigarettes. Disposable vapes would be banned and illegal vape sales to children would attract a £100 fixed penalty fine for shops in England and Wales. Vape flavours would be restricted and new conditions for display would reduce the appeal of vapes to young people.

3.48 The legislation was not enacted prior to the dissolution of parliament for the general election and its future is now unclear. At an East Sussex level we will continue to work to reach our key smoking populations, offering individuals innovative support and interventions to stop smoking using smoking cessation responsive to their needs. Public Health will continue to work

with Trading Standards to disrupt the supply of illegal tobacco and underage vape sales and will work with local businesses during any period of transition should the legislation progress.

Women's Health Strategy for England

3.49 While women in the UK on average live longer than men, women spend a significantly greater proportion of their lives in ill health and disability, and historically the health and care system has been designed without women's voices or needs adequately represented. Public Health is continuing to work closely with NHS Sussex on development of the local response to the ['Women's Health Strategy for England'](#) strategy, including insight work with underrepresented groups and better understanding of data. We will also review the services we commission to improve outcomes for women.

New opportunities for NIHR funding

3.50 The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is funding innovative research collaborations between local government and the academic sector to focus on improving wider determinants or drivers of health. In partnership with the University of Brighton, we have established a Research Collaborative Hub to attract research investment and interest, positioning the local authority in a competitively advantageous position. Academics, NIHR funded staff, and Public Health team members will work together on a variety of research projects with the aim of achieving publishable findings that will positively influence council policy. The hub will provide research training for council and wider public health staff to improve the potential to apply for, and secure, research funding from the NIHR and other organisations.

Commitment to becoming a Creative Health County

3.51 Creative Health refers to the broad range of opportunities that the arts, creativity, heritage, and culture contribute directly or indirectly to improving the population's health. Based on evidence showing benefits to population health, Public Health has embraced creativity as a health determinant and has developed an action plan informed by the county's first position paper on Creative Health. The Action Plan focuses on take up of creative health by both individuals and the community, with support from across the system. This includes work linked to population level health improvement; mental and physical health and wellbeing; social prescribing; early intervention; participation and youth voice; economic development; employment education; and training.

Suicide Prevention

3.52 Public Health will continue to work with colleagues across Sussex to implement the recently published Sussex Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2024-27. This includes plans to increase the involvement and collaboration of people with lived experience, identifying prevention activity, co-ordination and provision of training, improving the support provided to those bereaved and affected by suicide and self-harm prevention in children and young people. In East Sussex a multi-agency group oversees our East Sussex Strategy and Action plan, which aims to address key risk factors for suicide. We use the same approach to address drug-related deaths and self-harm in East Sussex. We are also developing local innovative projects aimed at addressing key risk factors for suicide.

3.53 This year we will pilot a new Beachy Head Ambassador scheme with volunteers promoting the area and its attractions, as well as providing an extra pair of eyes for those who may be vulnerable and in need of help. We will also complete an ecological assessment to ascertain the potential to use land management techniques (such as planting and grazing) to influence behaviour at the cliff edge.

Climate Change and Health

3.54 People with poorer health, and/or are otherwise disadvantaged by age, economic income, and housing for example, suffer the greatest consequences from climate change. We are commissioning a Health Impact Assessment to identify health impacts from climate change, how and where they impact the county and to support the climate change, health and social care agenda. The assessment will review the health impacts of policies, projects, practice, and decision-making, in relation to vulnerable people and health inequalities, and align to place based approaches within the Integrated Care System.

4. Children's Services

4.1 This section outlines ongoing reforms in children's social care following publication by Government of a number of strategies in response to independent reports on the urgent issues within the system. The implementation of reforms set out in the national SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan in 2023 is also progressing along with wider developments in the education system.

4.2 This section also summaries priority focus areas for Children's Services locally, including developing family support and improving placement sufficiency for the children we care for. In addition, there is information on demand led service pressures; work with schools to improve post-pandemic educational recovery and school attendance; and increases in demand for home to school transport.

National reforms to children's social care

4.3 In early 2023, the Government published an implementation strategy and consultation on reforming children's social care in England. The [Stable Homes Built on Love](#) strategy is based on, and formed by, the Government's response to three independent reports published in 2022. The strategy sets out reforms across six pillars which are intended to be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, currently underway, the Government is investing £200m in addressing urgent issues and laying the foundations for whole system reform. In phase two, the Government will focus on embedding reform everywhere.

4.4 Families First pathfinders, part of new a Family Help model, were piloted in three local authorities in 2023, with a further nine local authorities running pilots from April 2024. These pathfinders are testing new approaches to delivering Family Help, including removing the distinction between targeted early help and children in need and providing intensive multi-disciplinary support. There is also change to front line child protection practice, including some child protection functions being led by a group of multi-agency staff. Early learning from these pathfinders is being shared with all local authorities and is informing our planning.

4.5 Alongside the ambitious reforms taking place as set out in Stable Homes, Built on Love, from April 2024, the Department for Education (DfE) is bringing together the spectrum of Family Help reforms, including ownership of the Supporting Families programme. The move to the DfE should mean a more joined up, cross-government approach to family policy.

4.6 As part of the reforms, a National Kinship Care strategy: [Championing Kinship Care](#) has been published which commits £20m in 2024/25 to improve the lives of children in kinship care. This includes a £16m pilot giving a financial allowance to special guardian kinship carers; caring for children previously looked after by the local authority; guidance for employers on how kinship carers can be supported at work; and an expansion in the role of Virtual School heads to promote the education of children in kinship care.

4.7 ESCC Children's Services has a strong track record promoting family networks and supporting kinship care through our Connected Practice approach and family group conferencing. Many of the recommendations in the strategy are already being delivered and we will work to take forward the wider recommendations in 2024.

4.8 There are further elements of national reform which we will be taking forward locally with our partners:

- [The Social Care National Framework](#) brings together the purpose, principles, enablers, and outcomes that children's social care should achieve so children, young people and families can thrive. The framework sets out a vision that sees local authorities and all partners, particularly health, police and education, working together to achieve the reforms in Stable Homes Built on Love.
- The national multi-agency statutory guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) has been updated and sets out a framework for how local safeguarding partners (the local authority, Integrated Care Board, and police) should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children. The new partnership arrangements have been agreed by the Pan-Sussex lead strategic partners and the delegated safeguarding partners and will be implemented from September 2024.
- The [Children's Social Care: Data and Digital Strategy](#) sets out the DfE's long term plan to transform data in children's social care. It provides information on the foundations needed to improve information sharing and the evaluation and improvements to data services. The DfE is also working on a Children's Social Care dashboard which will bring data together in one place to understand progress towards the outcomes of the National Framework.

4.9 In response to Stable Homes Built on Love, the DfE has rolled out Early Adopters for the Early Career Framework for social workers. After a competitive application process, ESCC was chosen to be part of this programme which will explore how local authorities deliver their:

- assessed and supported year in employment programme, which gives newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of employment;
- second year programmes; and
- Professional Practice Development Programme to train experienced practitioners and managers to support early career social workers to develop their emotional wellbeing and practice behaviours.

Service Demand

4.10 Children's Services, both nationally and locally, continue to see a sustained high level of demand and complexity in the needs of children and their families. The continued increase in demand is impacted by children's, young people's and parents' mental health and emotional wellbeing (with issues relating to neurodiversity increasingly a factor); cost of living challenges; an increase in the number of families in temporary accommodation; and domestic abuse and substance misuse.

4.11 Over the past two years, ESCC has experienced a 23% increase in the number of social care assessments being undertaken with children and families, and a 28% increase in children subject to child protection planning. We have also seen a 3% increase in the number of looked after children (not including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children). This demand has undoubtedly put pressure on services, and we will need to ensure we have sufficient capacity to meet our statutory duties. We are addressing these increased demands through a number of preventative approaches.

4.12 Our 11 Family Hubs, opened in 2023/24, are a vital part of our Early Help offer to families, providing early support and advice from midwives, health visitors, early communication support workers, early years practitioners and more. East Sussex is one of 15 authorities awarded trailblazer status, with a focus on parent/infant relationships and perinatal mental health. We have been selected for the national evaluation of Family Hubs Trailblazers with particular interest in our triage offer for perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship support. The pilot and funding cease in March 2025 and we will focus on making this key preventative service sustainable.

4.13 In January 2024, our Connected Families Service launched a new multi-disciplinary team, Connected Families Intervention Practitioners. The team draws upon the evidence based family safeguarding approach and is made up of specialist practitioners who deliver support and interventions to parents/carers experiencing domestic abuse, problematic mental health and/or problematic drug and alcohol use. Supported parents/carers have children on Child in Need or Child Protection plans. The aim is to provide dedicated help to parents/carers, enabling more children to live with their families to support their wellbeing and life chances. This is a major development for 2024-25 as we seek to contribute positive, sustainable change in the lives of the children and families we work with. It is also aligned with the national vision of multi-disciplinary, whole family working set out in Stable Homes Built on Love.

4.14 Throughout 2023, Children's Services worked with IMPOWER consultancy on improved forecasting and shaping of placement sufficiency for the children we care for. Ambitious targets are in place to achieve reduced spend, but only by meeting children's needs more appropriately. In 2024/25 we will take forward and embed:

- The Valuing Care approach to enhance our ability to secure the right care for the right child for the right length of time;
- An enhanced in house foster carer offer and increased capacity in commissioning to achieve effective market management and shaping of sufficiency; and
- The reunification framework to support children to return home where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

4.15 As part of the South East Regional Fostering Recruitment and Retention programme, foster carers are supported locally on their journey from initial enquiry, to application, through a centrally run front door. A regional recruitment campaign is being launched to boost the number of initial enquiries through Recruitment Support Hubs. We will embed new ways of working through the South East Regional Recruitment Hub whilst maintaining a focus on local need, targeted recruitment activity and maintaining our retention offer. We will be delivering the evidence based Mockingbird model of support to a group of foster carers which aims to build strong and supportive relationships among groups of foster carers and children in an area.

Youth Service Developments

4.16 We have been successful in securing more than £7m in funding through the Government's Youth Investment Fund to significantly improve youth centres in Heathfield and Peacehaven over the next year.

4.17 ESCC has also secured funding through the Home Office Youth Endowment Fund to test how multi-agency partnerships can keep young people safe from violence and criminal exploitation. The Youth Justice Service will be leading this work over the next 18 months and is implementing a family support model, delivered by a multi-disciplinary team who will work with the local community and tailor support to local need. This is part of piloting approaches from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and will be independently evaluated. Subject to

positive findings from the initial evaluations, it is intended that these multi-agency teams will be funded and evaluated for a further two to three years.

4.18 We have secured resources from NHS Health Inequalities to support positive activities for children and young people in a number of Primary Care Network areas. Using a social prescribing approach, the activities will benefit children who have left care, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and Ukrainian children.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

4.19 The [SEND and Alternative Provision \(AP\) Improvement Plan](#), published in March 2023, sets out the Government's planned national reforms to the SEND and AP system. At the centre of the plan is 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). The development of new guidance for all schools is not expected to be complete until 2025. The Government introduced the SEND and AP Change Programme Partnership in September 2023 which will inform the guidance and test some of the proposed changes to the system for supporting children and young people with SEND. East Sussex is part of the Change Programme Partnership in the south east, along with West Sussex, Brighton & Hove and Portsmouth.

4.20 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. We will continue to work proactively, analysing data to project future demand, and working with schools and trusts to develop inclusive practices and more specialist provision where appropriate. May 2024 marked the midway point of our [2022-2025 East Sussex SEND Strategy](#) which sets the strategic direction for SEND in East Sussex. The strategy represents a joint approach to provision and commissioning across education, health, and care, focused on meeting the needs of children, young people, and families.

Schools policy

4.21 The Department for Education (DfE) has remained committed to the aspiration that all schools become part of Multi Academy Trusts. The Council continues to work with the Joint Primary and Secondary Board to shape a strong and cohesive school landscape across all phases. We play a critical role in facilitating strong local partnerships between schools, including through the development of Multi Academy Trusts.

4.22 In 2022, the DfE confirmed its intention to pass legislation which will see local authorities maintain a register of children of compulsory school age who are not enrolled at specified categories of schools. In October 2023, the DfE published a revised version of this plan for consultation, recommending that local authorities should operate the scheme as voluntary. The consultation closed in January 2024 and we await further information.

Educational attainment and attendance

4.23 East Sussex has been identified by the Government as an Education Investment Area, and Hastings as a Priority Investment Area. As an Education Investment Area, Multi Academy Trusts that are interested in expanding or setting up in East Sussex are prioritised for development funding from the DfE. As a Priority Investment Area, Hastings schools are receiving funding up to August 2025 to improve educational outcomes.

4.24 The pandemic had a significant adverse impact on school attendance, both nationally and locally. The proportion of children persistently absent (missing more than 10% of sessions)

has doubled. In May 2022, the Government published attendance guidance to clarify responsibilities for local authorities, schools, parents, and carers. This outlines the expectation that all councils should strengthen their oversight of attendance through regular individual dialogue with all schools. Councils should also provide whole family early help support, free of charge, to schools and families with children whose attendance is less than 50%. This guidance will become statutory in August 2024.

4.25 Locally, there will be a continued focus on working with schools to improve engagement with families who may need extra support with attendance. Supported by an additional annual investment of £1.5m to deliver the expectations set by the Government in its new guidance, a new Level 2 Early Help Key Work service has been in place from September 2023 to work with children and young people and their families where attendance is below 50%.

Local education priorities and strategic challenges

4.26 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, 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.

4.27 Education reduces risks to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. A key area of our school improvement strategy includes opportunities for schools and settings to develop communities which promote good mental health and wellbeing. Mental Health Support Teams, funded by the NHS and managed by the Council, will continue to be integrated into schools in East Sussex. Currently, 75 schools are supported by Mental Health Support Teams; this number is due to increase by approximately 20 schools by September 2024.

4.28 We have expanded the offer of support and training for all schools across the county as part of a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing. There are three Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Advisers who work across three localities, offering support with mapping provision, delivering training and sharing best practice. Support for parents and carers in relation to mental health and emotional wellbeing is also provided.

Home to school transport

4.29 Recent rises in fuel costs and driver shortages have led to exceptional increases to the cost of contracts providing taxis for pupils requiring home to school transport. The majority of spend for home to school transport relates to children with special educational needs and disability. The number of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is forecast to rise in East Sussex by 24.2% over the next three years, having increased by 25.7% in the last three years. Increased complexity of needs post-pandemic and geographical spread, both reducing the possibility of taxi sharing, are also driving cost increases. Current market conditions are also leading to fewer providers bidding for routes and increased contract prices.

5. Migration

5.1 Significant national developments on legislation in relation to immigration, asylum and refugee resettlement, as well as increased demand for support, have led to additional pressures locally. This section outlines key national developments as well as our local response.

National policy developments

5.2 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. National policy developments include: a ‘full dispersal’ asylum system whereby local authorities are expected to be asylum dispersal areas; streamlining the asylum process; new large asylum accommodation sites to reduce use of contingency hotels; funding and policy measures to support the resettlement and accommodation of Afghans and Ukrainians; the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) to change law on people arriving outside prescribed routes claiming asylum in the UK; and an ‘asylum partnership arrangement’ with Rwanda to resettle people who would claim UK asylum. A new Cap on Safe and Legal Routes, based on consultation with local authorities, is due to be set in summer 2024, and to be in operation in 2025.

5.3 The Government also announced changes to visa routes from Ukraine earlier in 2024. This included closing the Ukraine Family Scheme; reducing the Homes for Ukraine visa from three years to 18 months for new applicants; and creating a new Ukraine Permission Extension scheme. The Ukraine Permission Extension scheme will allow Ukrainians in the UK to apply for a further 18 month stay after initial visas expire. Continued funding for new arrivals and host ‘thank you’ payments for the initial visa period under Homes for Ukraine has been confirmed.

5.4 The Council and partners will continue to shape local implementation of national policies and schemes and help arrivals in the county access safe accommodation, services and support.

Local response

Asylum Dispersal

5.5 By early 2023 hotels in East Sussex used for ‘contingency’ accommodation for people seeking asylum were closed as part of Government plans to phase out this accommodation. The Council meets partners regularly to review legacy issues and support those affected. Some of those previously accommodated in contingency hotels received refugee status prior to hotel closures and therefore may require ongoing local support, including with housing, employment, benefits and other support services. We expect some people who moved to other asylum sites will return to East Sussex on receiving refugee status if they have established links to the area.

5.6 The Home Office is exploring the use of large sites, including the Northeye site in Bexhill, to reduce the use of hotels. Welfare and service capacity concerns for specific sites continue to be discussed with partners and the Home Office to inform planning and decision making. Regular Northeye Multi-Agency Forums continue and, whilst a final Home Office decision on its use is pending, the Council will continue to engage to plan next steps and ensure our local context is understood.

5.7 Implementation of the Government’s new dispersal plans will require Home Office procurement of suitable accommodation, and progress with this has been gradual in East Sussex. Local authorities will actively highlight the risks to local services and infrastructure of additional asylum accommodation in the south east. Housing authority areas will be allocated target dispersal numbers and local housing authorities will be funded per dispersal bed.

5.8 The streamlined asylum process seeks to accelerate processing all asylum claims to reduce and clear the backlog. For successful claims, people will become eligible for housing and other support which may temporarily increase pressure on services.

Refugee Resettlement

5.9 The Government has established two resettlement schemes for Afghan citizens and provides a standard integration funding package to councils which support resettlement through these schemes. In East Sussex, this is led by district and borough councils. Eligible Afghan

families may be temporarily accommodated before accessing long term accommodation. The Council and our partners will continue to ensure people temporarily accommodated locally receive support and that statutory duties are met.

Visa schemes

5.10 Government visa schemes enable people from certain states to apply for visas, enter the UK, and access services, some benefits, and rights to work. Locally, we are seeing some people on work visas, who are not entitled to most benefits, struggling to maintain their independence, leading to financial problems and the need for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) support. The Council will continue to engage with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration and partners to secure funding, ensure access to support, and enable the integration of people living in East Sussex.

5.11 The Homes for Ukraine programme and partnership will continue to support the arrival, settlement, integration and independence of Ukrainians in East Sussex. The Council and partners will assess the impact of 2024 changes to visa routes for Ukrainians to ensure people receive the support they need.

Support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

5.12 The Council remains committed to the [National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children](#). Children are well supported by a specialist team of practitioners who are experienced and skilled in understanding their needs, and the impact of their earlier life experiences. Whilst the National Transfer Scheme ensures funding for under 18s, there are significant budget pressures associated with those who become care leavers who often, due to complexities relating to their immigration status, require support until they reach the age of 25.

Future support

5.13 With developing national policy and legislation, as well as expected increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in UK due to climate change and international conflicts, the Council anticipates needing to provide significant support to refugees and asylum seekers over the long term. This will require the continued development of local resources, knowledge, new and existing partnerships, and a strategic local and regional approach.

6. Communities

6.1 The following section outlines the Council's ongoing partnerships and work with local communities and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to connect people and places, build and develop a thriving VCSE sector and meet community needs, including keeping communities safe.

Financial Inclusion

6.2 The multi-agency Financial Inclusion Steering Group aims to enable all partners to better understand, develop and respond to the financial pressures that residents are experiencing. Our Financial Inclusion Programme priorities continue to include providing central information on finance support; working with partners to deliver the East Sussex money guides training programme; promoting the Low Income Families Tracker to identify those most in need of support; commissioning and delivering relevant targeted services; and using research and insight to ensure efficient use of collective resources and targeting of support.

Household Support Fund

6.3 The Financial Inclusion Programme manages the Department for Work and Pensions' Household Support Fund in East Sussex. The Council and delivery partners ensure the funding

received from Government reaches vulnerable households through a number of initiatives, including food vouchers for 2-19 year olds eligible for free school meals over school holidays; targeted campaigns; and work with departments and partners to deliver funding and information. The national extension of the Household Support Fund will continue to provide this financial support to low income households in need until September 2024.

Working with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector

6.4 Our Third Sector Support programmes (Volunteering, VCSE Infrastructure, Patient and Resident Voice) connect people and places, build and develop a thriving VCSE sector, and promote a preventative approach to meeting community needs. The Council invests in the VCSE Alliance and will continue to work with it and Partnership Plus on programmes including: Tackling Loneliness Stewardship; VCSE Commissioning Excellence; Community Networks Support; and Multi-Agency Financial Inclusion. The Council invests in two major strands of activity linked to volunteering: encouraging and nurturing volunteering via Generic VCSE Infrastructure Services; and a platform to support/promote organisations that engage volunteers and to help people view local volunteering opportunities.

Community Network Support Programme

6.5 The Council will continue to work with partners on the Community Network Support Programme to develop the 66 networks across the county and determine factors and measures that comprise successful community networks. The programme will support networks with governance, operations, resourcing, communication, and partnership working. The programme will signpost to existing support and co-develop and test new support with partners.

Community Safety

Drug and Alcohol Misuse

6.6 The Government's 10 year combatting drugs strategy [From Harm to Hope](#) will continue to shape the local response to drug and alcohol misuse. The strategy has three main aims: to break drug supply chains; to deliver a world class treatment and recovery system; and to achieve a generational shift in the demand for drugs.

6.7 Locally, this work is overseen by the Harm to Hope Board and the different strands of work are addressed by specialist sub-groups. The work will contribute towards increasing the number of people in structured treatment, a reduction in drug-related deaths, and an increase in people leaving prison and transferring to community treatment. It will take a systemic, multi-agency approach, drawing on local partners including health and Sussex Police. Due to additional ring-fenced funding ending in March 2025, some services may be decommissioned and work to re-model treatment and recovery services will be the focus for the year ahead.

Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls

6.8 The pan-Sussex Domestic Abuse Partnership Board will lead on conducting the full needs assessment and strategy for 2024 to identify local gaps and priorities for commissioning domestic abuse safe accommodation support. The results of the 2024 Needs Assessment will inform Council planning, policy, commissioning and budgets. The new burdens funding granted for 2021-2025 will continue to support council programmes and projects for victims/survivors.

6.9 The [Victims and Prisoners Act](#), passed before parliament was dissolved for the general election, will put specialist domestic and sexual abuse advocates on a statutory footing and will require commissioning authorities to collaborate in the commissioning of victim services. This

will support the Council's existing joint commissioning of specialist victim services with the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and NHS Sussex.

6.10 The Home Office is due to launch a public consultation on the Domestic Homicide Review statutory guidance in 2024. Expected changes include updated guidance for cases of suicide, which may impact Council commissioning, and coordinating domestic homicide reviews, which may have planning and resource implications for the Council and partners.

6.11 The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office is conducting a year long Domestic Homicide Oversight Mechanism pilot, with East Sussex as a pilot site to inform national roll out. The pilot will aim to understand ways to bring greater oversight from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office to the implementation of domestic homicide review recommendations.

6.12 The Council has reinstated our White Ribbon accreditation, following a successful application in 2024. As part of this accreditation we will deliver an ambitious action plan by February 2027 to demonstrate our commitment to ending violence against women and girls.

Serious Violence

6.13 Councils play a key role in tackling serious violence, and the Safer Communities Partnership evidence based needs assessment and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 will continue to focus on four key areas: early intervention and approaches; support for young people and vulnerable adults at risk of exploitation; supporting exploiters and high harm offenders to change their behaviour; and work with communities in areas most at risk.

6.14 Home Office funding for interventions to tackle serious violence is due to end in March 2025. This raises concerns about the sustainability of funded interventions in Children's Services, such as work to divert young people away from knife crime, and child exploitation interventions including keywork, groupwork, and support to parent mentors. The Government has announced £75m for Violence Reduction Partnerships, however this is subject to the Spending Review to take place after the general election.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

6.15 The Council will continue to play a key role in tackling modern slavery including identifying, referring and supporting victims; with community safety services and disruption activities; and by ensuring supply chains are free from modern slavery. There will be new recommendations arising from the [Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act](#) which could have implications for the Council around the need to ensure transparency in supply chains. Organisations in council supply chains and commissioned organisations are legally required to publish a slavery and human trafficking statement on how they will address Modern Slavery. We will be assessing compliance with legislation through the Local Government Association Modern Slavery 'maturity matrix'.

Preventing Violent Extremism

6.16 The threat to the UK from terrorism remains substantial (meaning an attack is likely). The Home Office has refreshed the [Prevent Duty toolkit](#) to support local authorities in meeting the Prevent Duty. The benchmarks within the toolkit will form part of an annual assurance process on the local delivery of Prevent. It is anticipated the Council will successfully meet all benchmarks in the 2024 annual assessment.

6.17 The Council will convene the Prevent Group to implement the recommendations in the [Independent Review of Prevent's report and government response](#). The Safer Communities

team will work alongside the Estates Team to ensure alignment with the [Protect Duty](#) which introduces new security requirements for certain public locations and venues to ensure preparedness for, and protection from, terrorist attacks.

Home Office Review of Community Safety Partnerships

6.18 The Home Office reviewed the role of Community Safety Partnerships and antisocial behaviour powers in 2023. Two changes arising from the review may impact the Council: the lowering of the age of a Community Protection notice and extending Drug Testing on Arrest powers to beyond the custody suite.

Trading Standards

6.19 Two new pieces of national legislation include additional statutory duties for Trading Standards. The Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, passed immediately before parliament was dissolved for the general election, will regulate areas such as online marketplaces and deal with issues such as fake reviews and will give Trading Standards, along with the Competitions and Markets Authority, powers to investigate, intervene and enforce.

6.20 The Tobacco and Vape Bill 2024, intended to ensure anyone who turns 15 or younger in 2024 will never legally be sold tobacco products, was not enacted prior to the election and it is unclear whether or how it will now be progressed. The Bill includes powers for Trading Standards to enforce the legislation as well as regulating the flavours and contents of vaping products and the packaging and product presentation of vaping products.

Local resilience arrangements

6.21 The UK Government Resilience Framework, launched in December 2022, set out the ambition to significantly strengthen the UK's strategic approach to resilience. This has already resulted in a number of national changes, such as the creation of a new UK Resilience Forum and a new Resilience Directorate in the Cabinet Office. Further guidance is awaited on the role of Local Resilience Forums, supporting vulnerable groups and the development of a social-economic resilience index to inform decision making. The Emergency Planning team will continue to monitor updates in this area to ensure our ongoing preparedness and amend plans in light of any new guidance or government requirements.

National planning reforms

6.22 A number of changes and reforms to the planning system were set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, although the majority require the introduction of secondary legislation, or changes to existing national planning policy. Some of these have already been made and consultations have taken place or are expected on various changes to the planning system including further extensions to permitted development rights and revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly those that relate to planning for housing.

6.23 The vast majority of the recent and emerging planning changes have some impact upon the County Council, both within our county planning authority role and through our statutory consultee and infrastructure provider role. There has been a particular emphasis from Government on seeing up to date Local Plans in place. This is of particular relevance to East Sussex, with the vast majority of the local planning authorities in the county not having such plans and therefore being susceptible to speculative and unplanned development proposals. Over the course of the coming two to three years the County Council will need to support these planning authorities in the production of their Local Plans, especially through our statutory roles (highways, flood risk and infrastructure planning and provision). It will also be important for the County Council, in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority and Brighton &

Hove City Council, to make timely progress on a full review of the Waste and Minerals Plan, which is due to commence in summer 2024.

6.24 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act also proposed reforms to the approach to development funded infrastructure and the introduction of the Infrastructure Levy. An initial consultation on the potential approach to the Infrastructure Levy was undertaken in spring 2023. Whilst the County Council welcomed the principle behind some aspects of the levy, we expressed a number of concerns, not least that it is unlikely to raise enough resources to properly fund both affordable housing and infrastructure provision. There are also concerns around the influence that county councils will have on spending decisions and the complexity of the system, which will require significant resources, skills and time to set up and implement. Further consultations are expected on the proposed Infrastructure Levy and it has been envisaged that implementation would be phased in over a 10 year period through a 'test and learn' approach. It will be important for the County Council to continue to assess and respond to such consultations, as well as working closely with the local planning authorities to ensure that there is the best possible chance of funding local infrastructure needs.

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 update to the Local Transport Plan and associated strategies, and planned improvements to local public transport.

Highways Maintenance

7.2. Balfour Beatty Living Places' contract for highways and infrastructure services in East Sussex has been in place for one year and has delivered on a number of road and footway maintenance and improvement schemes. This has included works above and beyond our usual programmes using additional funding provided by Cabinet. ESCC continues to face significant challenges in efficiently maintaining the network and addressing the increased deterioration of road and footway surfaces across the county. Work to improve the network will continue in 2024/25 and is scheduled to include:

- The replacement of 427 signs, focused on missing or damaged signs, and to include further work to clean signs and clear vegetation or other obstructions where necessary.
- 53 larger drainage schemes, after focusing on the delivery of quick and simple drainage schemes using additional funding in 2023/24.
- Using the remaining budget for the refresh of road markings to renew the lining along the A22 Hailsham bypass and around 600 further sites across the county.

7.3. ESCC continues to invest more in highway maintenance than the grant we receive from Government. Funding from the Department for Transport accounts for only £60m out of a total £120m investment in highway capital maintenance over the last four years. Even with the authority continuing to invest in this asset, we will never be able to address the total backlog of issues on our network without more long-term funding.

Local Transport Plan

7.4. 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. With considerable recent changes in national, regional and local policy related to the environment, health and economy, including the declaration of a climate emergency, the LTP covering the period 2024 to 2050 (LTP4) will influence how we plan and deliver transport in East Sussex in the future. We have embraced a vision-led approach in the review of the plan to

factor in the uncertainties of the future and to prioritise the needs of business, people and the places that they wish to live and work in.

7.5. Public and stakeholder consultation on the [draft LTP4](#) was undertaken between November 2023 and February 2024. The outcomes of the consultation are being analysed, including recommending any changes to the draft strategy. Formal approval of the updated plan will be sought in autumn 2024. The Rail Strategy and Freight Strategy, both supporting LTP4, will also be developed during 2024.

7.6. The LTP4 and associated documents will act as a strategic platform for prioritising and determining future investment in transport infrastructure in the county within the resources available. Opportunities to successfully secure external funding (usually via competitive bidding rounds) may impact on our ability to deliver on the strategy in the future.

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

7.7. ESCC received £41.4m in BSIP funding from the Department for Transport (DfT), of which £22m was capital and £19m was revenue. £20m of the capital funding was allocated to deliver bus priority measures which are to be delivered by October 2025. £13m of the revenue funding was allocated to bus service improvements, including Digital Demand Responsive Transport services, which are funded to April 2026. £5m of the revenue funding was allocated to reducing fares, which will provide reduced fares in East Sussex until April 2025.

7.8. Our updated BSIP, due to be submitted to the DfT in July 2024, covers progress to date and future bus service improvements that we would wish to deliver as part of the BSIP. There has been no confirmation of further BSIP funding beyond 2024/25. The DfT has indicated a BSIP may be required in 2025 and that funding may be allocated based on that submission. There has been no information provided on the scale or timescales of that funding.

7.9. Delivery of the East Sussex BSIP has supported local bus passenger growth with the county having the third highest growth in passenger numbers in England in 2022/23 compared to pre-pandemic levels. Additional bus service users have helped reverse the decline in bus use in the county and enabled bus operators to sustain more commercial services. However, ever increasing operational costs to run bus services mean that, without further external funding, there may be significant challenges beyond 2025/26 in sustaining the current level of bus service provision in the county.

Active travel

7.10. Our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), adopted in September 2020, sets out proposed local cycling and walking networks and measures for the key coastal towns and the market towns within the county. It provides a basis for seeking funding for walking, wheeling (wheelchairs and mobility scooters) and cycling infrastructure projects and is being used to inform the review of borough and district councils' Local Plans. The LCWIP will be refreshed in 2024 as a supporting document to LTP4.

7.11. At a national level, Active Travel England (ATE), sponsored by DfT, supports walking, wheeling and cycling. ESCC's local authority self-assessed active travel grade has been confirmed by ATE as Level 1, which has secured funding to deliver town centre based walking schemes and the development of pipeline schemes for future capital funding bids. These pipeline schemes include school streets schemes and an area based cycle scheme which have involved collaborative and co-design activities with communities and learning opportunities.

7.12. In the next year we are hoping to build on our current ATE level 1 assessment to unlock further external funding from ATE and support the delivery of the vision and objectives set out within our LTP. Without significant external funding investment towards these programmes we will not be able to deliver our ambitious plans for active travel infrastructure in the county.

Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

7.13. The [National Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy](#) was published in 2022, although last year the Government announced the push back of its proposal to end the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030 to 2035. The Council is committed to developing a strategy to support the growing needs of Electric Vehicles (EV) users within East Sussex. To reflect the national strategy at a local level, a draft EV Charging Strategy has been developed as a supporting document to our draft LTP4, subject to public and stakeholder consultation during 2024.

7.14. The ability to charge at or close to home is a major concern to many EV users and is a main priority within both the national and local EV charging strategies. In November 2023, we secured £4.4m under tranche 1 of the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund which will help the Council to scale up the delivery of local on-street chargepoints. This will enable more residents, especially those without off-street parking, to switch to EVs. The funding will also be used to provide chargepoints on the County Hall campus.

7.15. Separate grant funding has also been made available to local residents with no off-street parking to introduce EV chargepoints on their properties. This has implications for the Council in relation to licencing the installation of cable gully channels in the footway, as well as the liability and maintenance of these channels, alongside how this affects the commercial viability of potential on-street chargepoints delivered using the LEVI funding.

7.16. Procurement for a chargepoint operator will be undertaken during 2024 with an expectation that the initial roll out of on-street chargepoints will commence in late 2024/25. Following the initial investment and installation of chargepoints across the county, public take up will determine the future direction of this work. There is the potential that a proportion of the income generated can be used to support Council services.

Transport for the South East (TfSE)

7.17. TfSE's Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) was submitted to Government in March 2023. DfT has said that due consideration will be given to the plan when advising ministers on future policy and investment decisions. A SIP Delivery Action Plan has been established which requires the input of a number of different partners working together. The Action Plan is updated annually with progress of schemes and supported by an online interactive map-based tool.

7.18. TfSE is currently refreshing its Transport Strategy to take account of the impact of recent events including the pandemic, the UK leaving the European Union and recent changes in government policy. Technical work to refresh the strategy is underway with the strategy due to be submitted to Government in October 2025, following public consultation in early 2025.

Road Safety

7.19. A Speed Management Programme will review all A and B roads across the county during 2024/25 to ensure that the existing speed limits are the most appropriate for the road conditions and ensure that they are effective. Sections of road identified through this programme will have reduced speed limits extended or introduced, and measures to ensure compliance with existing limits where necessary.

7.20. We are continuing to implement innovative behaviour change focused projects which aim to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured (KSI) on the county's road network. A new behaviour change trial, in partnership with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), was launched in February 2024 and will continue into 2024/25. The trial targets young drivers and uses existing DVSA communication channels to engage with them in the six months after they pass their test. Communications are designed to address a range of behaviours which influence driving, reinforce the legitimacy of speed limits and the costs of driving unsafely. The trial is intended to reduce the overall rate of speeding offences, which evidence indicates is a suitable proxy for reducing the future risk of being involved in a KSI collision. The impact of the trial will be assessed in 2025.

Strategic Road Network (A27/A21)

7.21. The Government's second Roads Investment Strategy (RIS2), covering the period 2020-2025, identified 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. A study outlining potential options for the A27 was submitted to DfT by National Highways (NH) for consideration alongside other RIS3 pipeline scheme studies.

7.22. NH's Strategic Road Network Initial Report and South Coast Central Initial Report, published in May 2023, indicated that the A27 between Lewes and Polegate will slip to become a RIS4 (2030 to 2035) pipeline project. This follows on from the announcement made in March 2023 by the Secretary of State for Transport that the development and potential delivery of the majority of RIS3 pipeline schemes across the country would slip due to a combination of factors having an impact on the Government's capital roads investment programme. We will continue to engage with NH and DfT to make the case for investment in a more comprehensive solution for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, as well as improvements to the A21.

Local Highways Programme – Major Road Network

7.23. The Major Road Network (MRN) sits between the Strategic Road Network, which is the responsibility of NH, and the local road network, which is the responsibility of local authorities, and includes the busiest and most economically important local authority A roads. The MRN intends to provide more long-term certainty of funding, with a portion of the National Roads Fund being dedicated to the MRN. A number of roads in East Sussex are part of the MRN, and various outline business cases developed and submitted to the DfT for funding. Ongoing delays in decisions mean that we may have to review the schemes to fit the funding being sought in order to meet inflationary pressures on construction costs.

7.24. The development and delivery of these packages of MRN funded schemes are required to meet infrastructure needs that will come forward through district and borough Local Plans, as well as supporting the objectives of LTP4, the new Economic Prosperity Strategy, and BSIP.

Rail services

7.25. The Draft Rail Reform Bill was put before Parliament for pre-legislative scrutiny in February 2024. The Bill sets out a number of reforms from the Government's Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail including the creation of a new public body, Great British Railways. Together these changes would have a significant impact on rail passengers and businesses in the county. It is important that we continue to be involved in future processes associated with the delivery of the Plan for Rail and engage with Great British Railways to ensure these changes benefit our residents, those visiting East Sussex, and businesses operating in and out of the county.

7.26. 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 SIP and the LTP4 Implementation Plan. In the meantime, local MPs and the local authorities in East Sussex and Kent have been 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.

Transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Functions

8.2 In August 2023, Government confirmed its decision to discontinue LEP funding from April 2024. In light of this, South East LEP (SELEP), which covered East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock, took the decision to close operations, with LEP functions and responsibilities transitioning to upper tier local authorities in each of those areas from April 2024.

8.3 Since April 2024 ESCC has taken on relevant local SELEP responsibilities, including:

- Business representation – Team East Sussex (TES) will continue to operate in an advisory capacity, as the business-led strategic economic growth board for the county, providing the voice of business in steering the economic growth agenda.
- Strategic economic planning – The new East Sussex Economic Prosperity Strategy, jointly developed by the Council and TES, will be used to make the case for future access to Government programmes.
- The delivery of Government programmes – The Council is now the ‘accountable body’ responsible for current and future funding programmes and the Growth Hub.

8.4 A local Assurance Framework is being drafted to reflect these new responsibilities and the agreed LEP transition plan will be enacted through 2024/25.

East Sussex Economic Strategy

8.5 The transfer of LEP functions has placed even greater importance on the production of a new economic growth strategy for the county. The new strategy, titled East Sussex Prosperity, will be published imminently, as a strategy for the long term running to 2050, beyond current planning, economic and political cycles.

8.6 The strategy will seek to secure sustainable economic growth, setting out how, over the next generation, East Sussex can secure better opportunities and living standards for people who live in the county, and how businesses can flourish and grow sustainably. Although an attractive place to live, the county faces some significant economic challenges which have been persistent over time including low productivity, high costs relative to earnings, and sharp economic disparities within the county. The strategy seeks to address these challenges in the context of an economy which is likely to change radically in coming decades, as the county adapts to climate change and the transition to net zero, an ageing population, changing working patterns, and the consequences of ever more sophisticated digitalisation.

8.7 The transfer of strategic economic planning to the Council from SELEP is a welcome development. The strategic economic planning function is well placed to respond to any further evolution of government policy following the general election and to secure any new funding streams. Government has indicated that an annual review of the strategy may be required.

8.8 The Economic Development Team provides secretariat support to TES and will now include the transfer of the business representation function from SELEP. A new national assurance framework is awaited from Government, which could potentially require an open and regular recruitment process to further improve business membership of TES. There is also an expectation from TES that its sub-groups will play a greater role in delivering work to support it and the economic strategy. All five sub-groups are supported by ESCC.

Economic growth funding

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

8.9 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) focuses on three main investment themes: Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business, and People and Skills. It is managed by district and borough councils. A total allocation of £5.2m (across the five district and borough areas) has been made to East Sussex for the period April 2022 – March 2025. ESCC is working with district and borough partners to deliver pan-East Sussex business support programmes and skills interventions.

8.10 Future UKSPF monies or replacement programme (if any) will require decisions to be made before April 2025 when the current funding period comes to an end. This will likely require ESCC support in the preparation of new programme requirements such as investment and business plans, and the subsequent management and delivery of any projects.

Levelling Up Partnerships

8.11 In March 2023 Hastings and Rother were allocated £20m capital funding each from the Levelling Up Partnerships (LUPs) programme to deliver a tailored approach to place based regeneration, to be spent by March 2025. ESCC has worked with the two district and borough councils, Government and partners on various proposals, which has secured £7m of funding on five projects including Queensway Gateway Road, Hollington youth facility and Family Hub, other family and youth support services, and a combined skills capital fund for both areas.

8.12 The County Council has several teams involved in managing and delivering each of these projects which are timebound. The above assets will be owned by the Council (except for skills capital items) and will be managed within existing departmental resources.

Long Term Plan for Towns

8.13 The Long Term Plans for Towns was announced in October 2023, with both Hastings and Bexhill allocated £20m each, and Eastbourne also receiving a £20m allocation in March 2024. The grant funding is to be awarded as an endowment fund to be spent over a 10-year period, with 75% capital funding and 25% revenue funding. The priority investment themes to support the regeneration of the towns include community safety, high streets, heritage and regeneration, and transport and connectivity.

8.14 Each area is establishing a local board to agree the town's 10 year vision, and the priorities and spend which will form the long term town investment plan to be submitted by 1 August 2024. ESCC is directly involved in the strategic development of each town's investment plans and potentially identifying projects to address the investment themes for the initial first

three years allocation and throughout the 10 year lifetime of the programme. As a result, this programme will require ESCC officer support to be drawn in over a long period of time. Whilst this has the potential to bring in some external funding which would deliver on the Council's core priorities, this is not likely to replace existing budgeted activity.

Skills

8.15 National policy changes and reforms will continue to be considered and overseen by the Skills East Sussex (SES) Board, as well as local needs. The move towards Net Zero and the increase in automation and artificial intelligence (AI) remains a strong focus, as each has the potential to have significant implications. Skills East Sussex is identifying actions to address new skills needs and changes to employment that will be caused by these advances.

8.16 The Council's Employability and Skills Team run a number of programmes, some of which are time bound and subject to funding. The team will need to respond to substantial changes in policy and funding reforms in these areas, doing so in partnership across the Council and with external partners. Current programmes include:

- ongoing delivery via the acclaimed East Sussex Careers Hub and the ESTAR team (adult employability)
- Multiply numeracy programme (ends March 2025)
- 'Steps to Success' Effective Transitions pilot (ends March 2026)
- Moving on Up employability programme (ends March 2025),
- Support into Work for Ukrainians and refugee groups (ends October 2025)
- Homeless Prevention Employment project (ends March 2026)
- Levelling Up Partnership funding secured to deliver skills capital improvements in Hastings and Rother.

8.17 ESCC will continue to deliver Transform to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with advice on apprenticeships and skills training and help them to access government incentives and unspent levy funds to pay for apprenticeship training. Changes in government policy mean that in 2024/25, ESCC will be able to allocate up to 50% of its apprenticeship levy to local SMEs if not used by the Council for its internal apprenticeship programmes.

8.18 Changes in the post-16 education offer will continue to be implemented in 2024/25, with T-Levels (which require work experience placements) replacing taught vocational qualifications. The impact of these changes will be monitored to see whether they improve the quality and range of learning available to young people and adults, or if the work experience requirements reduce the volume of vocational provision in the county. Changes to Adult Education are being introduced this year, with greater emphasis placed on the programme as a vehicle for supporting adults towards employment and less opportunity for leisure-based learning.

8.19 Universal Support, a new Department for Work and Pensions programme, will resource employability programmes for unemployed people from specific cohorts, including care leavers, homeless adults, people with disabilities, those at risk of unemployment and refugees (including Ukrainians). The fund will be awarded to upper tier councils, subject to bidding processes, from November 2024 for three year programmes to support people into work and to retain employment.

Culture and tourism

8.20 ESCC, West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) have secured Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) accreditation for Sussex as part of a

national restructure of destination management led by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and delivered by Visit England. This new framework will support the sector to become more accessible, sustainable and financially resilient, and act as the conduit for national training, sector toolkits and shared marketing collateral between Visit England and all Sussex destination marketing and management organisations. This will require ESCC, WSCC and BHCC to support a LVEP Board and a coordinating LVEP officer post, which will be hosted by BHCC as the LVEP accountable body. Whilst no future grant opportunities from Visit England have been confirmed, eligibility for any future funding will be dependent on the existence of the LVEP, which will be required to be the lead applicant for any future funding.

8.21 ESCC and WSCC have come together to develop Experience Sussex, a destination management organisation which will seek to achieve a £2.5bn increase in the value of the visitor economy over the next 30 years. ESCC is committed to an initial two years of investment to support this collaboration. Going forward, the Experience Sussex model will look to offset some budget requirement through commercial investment, earned income and collaboration with other stakeholders.

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, protection and enhancement of the local natural environment, waste management and flood risk management. It is important to note that net zero is increasingly integrated into wider policy and 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 the delivery of net zero.

Climate change – national policy context

9.2 In 2021 the 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 indicate that local authorities are widely considered to have a key role in decarbonising services such as local transport, waste disposal, public buildings and other local services. 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.

9.3 In 2022 the Government-commissioned [Independent Review of Net Zero, 'Mission Zero'](#), again identified the key role of local government and recommended several policy changes, including simplifying the fragmented funding landscape for local net zero projects. Government responded to the review in the 2023 [Net Zero Growth Plan](#). The plan made few hard commitments for local government but did promise to pilot a devolved approach to building retrofit as part of devolution deals and explore simplification of the net zero funding landscape.

9.4 In September 2023, the Prime Minister announced a 'new approach to net zero', which delayed or removed several net zero commitments. This included delaying the proposed bans on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans, and the installation of new oil and gas boilers and new coal heating for off-gas-grid homes to 2035.

9.5 Every five years, the Government produces an assessment of the risks and opportunities from climate change and how it plans to adapt. The current report, the [National](#)

[Adaptation Programme 3](#), explains the Government's plans to adapt to climate change during 2023 to 2028, including how it will:

- Adapt infrastructure (for example, our electricity networks and railways).
- Protect buildings and their surroundings (for example, from hotter temperatures).
- Mitigate international impacts on the UK (for example, on imported food supplies)

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 own activities as soon as possible and in any event by 2050. This is in line with the updated national target agreed in 2019. ESCC has committed to cutting its corporate carbon emissions by an average of 13% per year and set aside an additional £9.9m to help meet this reduction target for the period up to March 2025. Actions to implement the Council's own climate change commitments are set out in the [Climate Emergency Plan](#), covering the period 2023 – 2025. A plan for the period 2025 – 2030 is in development.

9.7 The cost for the Council 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. ESCC has secured over £1.9m of external funding to contribute to covering these costs, but there remains a very large gap between the resources available and the resources required to get to net zero.

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. ESCC's Climate Emergency Plan makes the following commitments to ensure that the council can continue to operate effectively as the climate changes, which we are currently in the process of implementing:

- 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 The Council continues to progress work with partners on climate mitigation and adaptation across the county through the [Climate Emergency Road Map](#) overseen by the East Sussex Environment Board. The road map summarises many areas of work that the Council leads, or collaborates with partners on, to mitigate and adapt to climate change. 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.

Environment Act

9.10 The Environment Act 2021 placed a number of new duties and responsibilities on ESCC, the implications of which are covered below. These may also provide new opportunities to protect and enhance local ecology.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

9.11 Under the Act, ESCC is the Responsible Authority for producing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove. LNRSs are a means to identify and agree, at the local level, the priorities and actions needed to drive nature recovery and the wider environmental benefits that will arise from a healthy natural environment. They are intended to direct future effort and funding for nature recovery and must be developed in line

with secondary legislation and statutory guidance. Additional burden monies have been provided by Government for two years to help pay for the cost of developing the LNRS. It is currently unclear how implementation costs for the three to 10 year reviews of the LNRS that ESCC is expected to carry out will be covered.

9.12 ESCC is working closely with West Sussex County Council to share expertise and resources and to reduce the impact on shared stakeholders. Together, we are carrying out extensive stakeholder engagement, to be followed by a public consultation at the end of 2024, with publication of the final LNRS in summer 2025. Delivery of the LNRS will lie with a range of stakeholders, including ESCC.

Biodiversity

9.13 The Environment Act requires new developments to deliver a minimum of a 10% gain in biodiversity, known as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This became mandatory for major developments in January 2024 and for all others (with a few exemptions) in April 2024. Once published, the LNRS is expected to guide the delivery of BNG to the best strategic locations for nature recovery. All off-site BNG and any 'significant on-site' (to be locally defined) BNG must be maintained and monitored for at least 30 years following development, secured through planning conditions and/or legal agreements.

9.14 The Government has provided additional burden monies to help assess and monitor the implementation of BNG. Early indications suggest that this is unlikely to be sufficient to cover all costs. In preparation for BNG, ESCC has been actively upskilling relevant local planning authority officers and teams, primarily through the Sussex Nature Partnership, which is hosted by ESCC, and through service level agreements with the district and borough councils for the provision of ecological advice for planning.

9.15 The requirement for habitat sites to be created to cater for BNG offers the opportunity for planning authorities, including ESCC, to use their own land holdings to offset their own developments, and potentially to sell BNG 'credits' to other developers looking to purchase off-site BNG. Given the relatively small amount of land ESCC owns, opportunities are likely to be limited, and it should be recognised that habitat banks require an initial investment to establish.

9.16 The Environment Act also strengthens the existing Biodiversity Duty and requires 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. ESCC published its [Biodiversity Duty first considerations report](#) in December 2023 in line with statutory guidance. The first report on progress and delivery, which will include reporting on the delivery of BNG, must be published no later than three years after that date, with subsequent reports published every five years. No additional burdens funding is expected to support this duty.

Waste provisions

9.17 The Environment Act introduces several changes to how waste services operate. Changes will include the introduction of extended producer responsibility for packaging in 2024, the provision of weekly food waste collections in 2026, and the introduction of a deposit return scheme in 2027. These changes will impact the Council's waste contracts, will require changes to facilities and will alter the amount of waste and recycling that we manage.

Air quality

9.18 The Environment Act significantly strengthened the duties on upper tier authorities with respect to air quality. It requires all tiers of government (and neighbouring authorities) to co-

operate in the development of action plans where Air Quality Management Areas have been declared. Statutory guidance states that if a borough or district council intends to prepare an Air Quality Action Plan, ESCC must propose specific measures it will take to help secure the achievement and maintenance of air quality standards and objectives in the relevant area, including target dates. Currently, there are two air quality management areas in East Sussex, one covering a part of Lewes town and one covering part of Newhaven. These were both declared prior to the Environment Act 2021 and the Air Quality Action Plans produced by Lewes District Council were developed with input from ESCC.

Flood risk management

9.19 Government has been seeking to implement legislation that would see 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 would 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 was expected in 2023, but did not take place. Until further details emerge resource and budget implications for the Council cannot be established.

UK Emissions Trading Scheme

9.20 In July 2023 the Government proposed expanding the UK Emissions Trading Scheme to include the energy from waste sector from 2028 onwards to help the UK achieve its net zero target. The energy from waste sector is responsible for about 1% of UK carbon emissions. Inclusion of Newhaven Energy Recovery Facility in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme will have significant financial and operational impacts from 2028 onwards. All facilities will need to decarbonise or pay for allowances. Consultation is expected on this proposal, to which the Council will respond, aiming to influence the national policy direction.

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; respond to workforce and pay challenges; continue delivery of the Council's Property Asset Management Plan including office space rationalisation; exploration of productivity enhancements potentially afforded by artificial intelligence; and adaptation to new procurement regulations. Preparations will also be made for the County Council election in May 2025.

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, so a replacement system is necessary. 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 offers the opportunity to deliver 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 is in its implementation period which requires process changes to be made across the Council as ways of working are updated, including by introducing new functionality such as self-service for tasks such as submitting timesheets and requisitions.

10.5 Following the deferral of the programme go-live date from November 2023, an independent assessment of the programme has recently been undertaken and work is in progress to set out a revised delivery approach, timings and associated resource requirement. A phased approach to implementation is now being taken with some changes in organisational ways of working, supported by considerable staff and wider engagement.

Workforce challenges

10.6 The Council continues to face significant recruitment and retention challenges as a result of the current national labour market conditions and cost of living pressures. 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.

10.7 In order to respond to these pressures and attract staff to work for the Council, plans include building on our 'We Choose East Sussex' recruitment brand to create additional engaging and informative content on the jobs pages of our website. Alongside this, we will attend local recruitment fairs to showcase the range of job opportunities at the Council and to connect with those who are looking for work. An important element of this will be to set out clearly the benefits of working for the Council and how we are an 'employer of choice'.

10.8 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. We are currently in the process of developing a 'work experience' package, the intention being to provide opportunities to support individuals to become work ready as well as encouraging individuals to consider the Council as the place to start their career.

10.9 Recent changes to the Apprenticeship Levy will enable us to transfer up to 50% of our levy to non-levy paying employers. We will build on the work undertaken to date through the Transform project to support small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in priority sectors to access our levy funding, supporting the skills development of our local population.

10.10 Retention of our 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, our updated People Strategy covering the three year period 2024 to 2027 has recently launched and, alongside this, a second cohort of our innovative 'Ladder to Leadership' programme has commenced. We continue to develop our extensive wellbeing offer to support our staff to remain healthy and well, both in and out of work.

Pay challenges

10.11 The introduction of the National Living Wage (NLW) created pressures as a result of its close proximity to the bottom end of the local government pay scales. Given the national employers' principle that local government should not be a minimum wage employer, maintaining headroom between the lowest rate of pay and the NLW has been a key objective of the recent national pay awards. The current top-end forecast of the NLW will have a significant impact on the lower end of the local East Sussex Single Status pay scales, in particular the first two grades. These grades currently cover a range of posts, the majority of which are in schools.

10.12 To address the NLW pressures, recent national pay awards have removed pay points at the bottom end of the pay structure. Whilst this has addressed the immediate NLW pressures, a continuation of this approach in future pay awards will likely result in the need for the local Single Status pay scales to be remodelled.

Property asset management

10.13 The Council's Asset Management Plan 2020-2025 includes an action plan to ensure operational assets are used efficiently, and a programmed approach to asset disposal has been established. There is continued focus on ensuring our assets are optimally utilised and continue to reduce their carbon and physical footprint. In 2024/25 this will include the office space in Eastbourne reducing from two office hubs to one, and office space in Hastings being reduced further. The use of County Hall is also being reviewed, reflecting its decreased utilisation post-Covid, and options for future use are currently being considered. There are also increased opportunities for reducing the wider estate, reflecting revised service models and rationalising use where possible.

10.14 The Council has an ambitious disposal of assets programme to secure capital receipts that will support the capital programme. The Community Asset Policy will be updated during 2024/25 which will allow a small number of assets with low monetary value to be available for potential disposals by community groups, voluntary sector and parish councils.

Technology supporting productivity

10.15 Developments in process automation and artificial intelligence (AI) present opportunities for the Council to support organisational capacity and resilience. IT & Digital will work with departments to support the identification and readiness of processes for automation and the enhancement of service delivery using AI capabilities. A Data Protection and Information Security Policy, supported by practical guidance, is being developed to support the responsible use of Generative AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, as departments explore specific uses.

10.16 Investment of resources will be required to provide skilled support and establish the technology infrastructure and prerequisite data architecture. AI fundamentally draws from datasets to learn, harvest and present information. If the right data does not exist, or is not of sufficient quality, it may not be possible to use AI for the intended purpose or there could be harmful consequences of doing so. A corporate Data and Insight Plan is being developed to set out activity required to help address this.

Procurement

10.17 The Procurement Act 2023 will come into force in October 2024. The legislation will have a significant impact on procurement teams over the next two years and beyond, and work is underway to understand how existing processes, systems, people, and planned procurement activity will be impacted. All staff in the procurement service will require a minimum of 10 hours of Cabinet Office issued training and many will need to complete three days 'deep-dive' training. In addition, there will be internal training requirements relating to local systems and processes, with relevant commissioners across the Council also needing to understand the impact of the Act and attend briefings as necessary. The resource implications of the planning, training and implementation will have a significant impact on the available capacity of the procurement team. This is in addition to Provider Selection Regime changes that came into effect in January 2024.

10.18 A revised National Procurement Policy Statement is due to be released in autumn 2024. This will align with the new regulations and continue to support our approach to social value and sustainable procurement.

Local Elections

10.19 The next County Council election is scheduled to take place in May 2025. Work will take place over the coming year to provide information to prospective candidates about the Council's work and the role of a county councillor through our 'Be a councillor' campaign. A comprehensive induction programme will be prepared for newly elected councillors to support them in taking up their roles. We will work closely with district and borough councils, who administer the election on behalf of the County Council, on the statutory election process.