

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 28 January 2025

**By:** Chief Operating Officer

**Title:** The Conservators of Ashdown Forest – 2024/25 forecast outturn position and updated medium term financial plan including the 2025/26 budget.

**Purpose:** To present the forecast financial position as at the end of 2024/25 and the updated medium term financial plan, with the 2025/26 Core budget for approval.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- 1) note the Quarter 2 budget position for the Conservators' 2024/25 Core Budget;**
  - 2) note the Conservators of Ashdown Forest medium term financial plan; and**
  - 3) approve the 2025/26 Core Budget.**
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### **1 Background**

1.1 This report sets out the financial position of the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest (COAF) for 2024/25 at Appendix 1, against the approved budget agreed by the Board of Conservators at their meeting on 20 November 2023 and was presented to Cabinet in January 2024. It also shows the COAF Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

### **2 Financial Year 2024/25**

2.1 The 2024/25 original budget set out a deficit budget of £130,129, being a surplus on the Core Budget of £1,402, and a deficit on the Countryside Stewardship (CS) budget of £131,531. At the end of September there is a forecast surplus of £15,990 in the Core budget.

2.2 Core budget expenditure is higher than budgeted. This is mostly due to the building of a boardwalk from the visitor centre and is funded from a Farming in a Protected Landscape grant (other restricted funding). There was a capital purchase of a new vehicle for the deer ranger and this has been funded by donations.

2.3 The current 2024/25 Core budget projections indicate that no additional contribution from ESCC will be required.

2.4 The current Countryside Stewardship (CS) budget is forecast to overspend by £25,996 this year. This is less than the budgeted overspend of £131,531 and similar to the previous year. The position reflects the difficulties that have been had securing contractors to undertake works on the forest. The Conservators are developing a three-year forest management plan and new procurement policy to lock in contractors over the coming three years. The deficit will be funded from the CS reserve.

### **2025/26 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2027/28**

2.5 The COAF 2025/26 budget and MTFP is shown at appendix 2. There is a small, budgeted surplus in the Core budget. It is therefore unlikely that ESCC will need to make an additional financial contribution. CS has a budgeted deficit of £24,726 which reflects an increase in planned works for 2025/26. The CS deficit will be funded from the CS reserve.

2.6 The CS programme comes to an end at the end of 2025; the Conservators will apply for the replacement CS scheme when the government announces the funding schemes available. The CS expenditure and income streams included from 2026/27 are therefore indicative pending that announcement.

### **3 Recommendations**

3.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- note the Quarter 2 budget position for the Conservators' 2024/25 Core Budget.
- note the Conservators of Ashdown Forest medium term financial plan.
- approve the 2025/26 Core budget.

**ROS PARKER**  
**Chief Operating Officer**

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Galley, Howell, Lunn & Georgia Taylor