Business Services – end of year 2024/25 Summary of progress on Council Priorities, issues arising, and achievements

Key cross cutting programmes

Carbon

In line with our current Climate Emergency Action Plan 2023-2025, progress continued in Q4 on the delivery of energy efficiency projects across the estate. A total of 3 projects were completed in Q4:

- 2 window replacement projects: Bexhill Library and Grovelands Primary School
- 1 Heat Decarbonisation Project: Peasmarsh Primary School

The Council Plan target for 2024/25 was to complete 23 energy efficiency projects and the outturn was 20. This reflects cuts to both the Salix Recycling Fund and the ring-fenced Council budget for directly funded carbon saving projects. However, there were business as usual projects which help make up some of the shortfall in project numbers, albeit with relatively lower carbon savings than targeted low carbon projects. Work to increase training continued, with 2 energy efficiency workshops taking place in Q4, bringing the total delegates trained during 2024/25 to 105, exceeding the target of 40. Ongoing work continued to support the 10 sites in the pilot Site Heating Control Interventions Initiative, with annual savings of £6,300 being achieved from no- or low-cost measures.

Energy consumption and carbon emissions are reported a quarter in arrears, so Q3 data is the most up to date information (ref i). Our carbon emissions for Q3 2024/25 were 2% lower than Q3 2023/24, despite the weather being slightly colder. The weather in Q4 will have significantly influenced the total annual consumption but if consumption was similar to Q4 last year, then the projected emissions reduction for 2024/25 would be 1.3% year on year compared to a 13% target. The reduction compared to the baseline year 2019/20 would be 36%, against a target of 50%. Actual outturn consumption and emissions data will be available in Q1/Q2 2025/26. The UK grid carbon emissions factor (which is the figure used to convert electricity consumption from the national grid into equivalent carbon emissions) has remained static since 2023/24, so the Q3 fall in emissions is due to a reduction in the amount of electricity and gas consumed by the Council.

The Council's annual spend on electricity has significantly reduced since 2019/20. The spend figures below have been estimated using the consumption figures from 2019/20 and 2023/24, price-corrected against the average unit rates from 2023/24. The spend figures are based on consumption only (i.e. not including standing charges or any other non-commodity costs).

Year	Spend
2019/20	£7,148,566
2023/24	£5,422,112

These spend figures demonstrate that the introduction of renewable energy creation (e.g. solar PV), a reduction in buildings owned and occupied, energy efficiency measures and initiatives, resulted in an estimated financial reduction of £1,726,454 (24% reduction) when comparing 2023/24 to 2019/20.

Oracle Implementation

Implementation of the Oracle Fusion system continued throughout Q4 with most modules of Phase 1 (Enterprise Performance Management) and all of Phase 2 (Finance with dependent HR processes, Procurement and Helpdesk modules) now live. The Recruitment module is also live and use by hiring managers will follow training in Q1 2025/26. Phase 3 (Payroll and all remaining HR processes) will be delivered during 2025 and 2026.

The programme is now in a 3 month 'hypercare' period of enhanced support from the programme team and partners. The system is proving stable and the majority of queries to the helpdesk are

about system access due to inherent complications with roles and permissions. This is typical in system implementations and improvements have been identified and are being implemented.

Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD)

During 2024/25 a new People Strategy was developed for 2024-2027. The strategy helps support our managers and staff to respond to the changing and challenging operating environment in which the Council exists. It supports the delivery of the Council's priorities and provides the direction and purpose for our people related activities. Stakeholder engagement confirmed the four themes from the previous strategy remain appropriate. These are: Leadership and Management; Performance, Development and Reward; Employee Engagement and Inclusion; and Employee Health and Wellbeing. Using the evidence gained from our engagement, the strategy includes specific activities and deliverables within each of the four themes. In conjunction with the People Strategy a 'Leadership Management Capability Framework' has been developed which sets out the management and leadership standards expected in support of the Council's priority outcomes and operating principles. Work is continuing with departments to embed this.

In common with many employers, we are experiencing recruitment and retention challenges in some occupational areas as a result of current labour market conditions and cost of living pressures. As part of HROD's work to respond to these pressures a number of actions have been implemented, including:

- Development of a new employer brand We Choose East Sussex and updated recruitment
 materials to identify the Council as an employer of choice. Throughout 2025/26 we will build on
 our successful recruitment campaign to understand more about what attracts people to join the
 Council and encourages them to stay.
- Implementation of a number of targeted recruitment and retention strategies such as a new 'refer a friend' scheme an updated relocation policy, employee loans policy, salary sacrifice schemes and financial wellbeing resources. Market supplements are paid for some of our roles, for example social workers in Children's Services.
- Continuation of hybrid working arrangements to broaden our recruitment pool and to respond to new expectations in the workforce on flexible working post-COVID-19. We are also developing digital approaches.
- Use of apprenticeships, traineeships and intern arrangements as a way of bringing new talent into the Council. This will be further developed as the arrangements for the new Growth and Skills Levy become clear.
- Attendance at events, such as careers fairs and shows, to maximise our presence with job seekers, as well as linking in with organisations that support people back into employment to extend our reach into sections of the labour market that are underrepresented or face significant barriers to employment.
- Guidance on making reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates has now been published and promoted to recruiting managers. The Council's suite of recruitment policies is also currently being reviewed to embed inclusive practice.
- Guidance on the use of volunteers, as a route into the workplace, is in development with the
 intention being for such opportunities to support people who are out of work to come back into
 the workplace through gaining confidence and experience of work.
- Guidance on the completion of exit interviews has also been published and a workforce
 planning toolkit launched in Q4 to support operational managers with forecasting and planning
 for future workforce capacity.

Attendance Management and Wellbeing

The 2024/25 year-end sickness absence figure for the whole authority (excluding schools) is 9.21 days lost per FTE, an increase of 0.9% since last year. The target of 9.10 days/FTE has therefore been missed.

Key drivers of this increase include:

- Flu-related absence, up by 1,025 days on 2023/24.
- Musculoskeletal (MSK)-related absence, up by 1,037 days on 2023/24 primarily within Adult Social Care.

Mental health remains the leading cause of absence, though the total number of days lost rose only marginally (+14 days). Notably, stress-related absence fell by 1,306 days, linked to proactive early contact with managers by the Attendance Management team since January 2023. This has helped reduce the average duration of stress-related absences from 24 to 17 days.

Actions underway:

- HR are reviewing short-term flu-related absence data and offering targeted coaching and training for managers as appropriate.
- Building on the success of the stress intervention, a pilot for early intervention for MSK-related absence in ASCH has now commenced, with contact being made with the manager in the first week of absence.
- The dedicated MSK project with Brighton University has completed its Phase 1 evidence gathering with recommendations, implementation will follow in September 2025.

Ongoing health and well-being initiatives include:

- Targeted health workshops addressing key absence reasons.
- Evaluation of well-being support via the "Most Significant Change" method, including feedback from the Time to Talk about Mental Health campaign.
- Expansion of our Mental Health First Aiders network.
- Regular menopause cafés to support staff wellbeing.

This multi-pronged strategy aims to ensure support and interventions are evidence-based, targeted, and responsive to staff needs.

<u>Procurement</u>

Procurement, contract and supplier management activities

The Council has spent £382m with local suppliers over the past 12 months. This equates to 60% of our total procurement spend, against a target of 60%. 815 local suppliers were used. The Procurement team continues to promote contract opportunities to local suppliers, as well as building local supply chain opportunities into tenders where possible.

Social Value

A number of contracts that commenced in 2024/25 secured significant social value commitment, including:

- Building & Washroom Cleaning Services for the Council's corporate and schools estate: The
 successful supplier committed to a Social Value offer of £1.76m over the initial 3 year contract
 term (14% of contract spend). Social Value benefits include apprenticeship and job
 opportunities for local people, including those in priority groups such as long term unemployed
 and young people not in employment, education or training (NEET); work experience and
 career awareness programmes offered to local schools and colleges; and initiatives to reduce
 operational carbon emissions.
- The Joff & Heathfield Youth Centres construction works: The successful supplier committed to a Social Value offer of £4.27m across the 2 contracts (69% of combined contract spend). Social

Value benefits include spend with local supply chains; apprenticeships; professional development opportunities for local people; job opportunities and employability support for local people in priority groups, including long term unemployed; and supporting environmental programmes with local groups, schools and colleges.

 Hollington Youth Hub Works Contractor: The successful supplier committed to a Social Value offer of £700k (30% of contract spend). Social Value benefits include spend with local supply chains; the creation of local jobs; work experience and career awareness programmes offered to local schools and colleges; local volunteering time for staff and initiatives to reduce operational carbon emissions.

The Social Value secured through our Property Frameworks used for the Planned Maintenance Programme in 2024/25 has been reported in Q4. Contracts with a combined value of £11.5m were awarded and secured £1.8m in Social Value, which equates to 16%. The Social Value consists of a number of different measures, including targeted spend with local sub-contracted suppliers and contractors, which is an important contributor to economic growth, and various employment and skills initiatives.

In Q4, a total of 11 contracts commenced, of which 8 were out of scope of the Social Value Measurement Charter, which quantifies the economic, social and environmental benefits of the procurement, as they accessed an existing pre-approved list of suppliers (Frameworks) with predefined contractual terms. The in-scope contracts for Q4 had a total contract value of £14.6m and secured £2.5m in Social Value commitment, which equates to an outturn of 17% against a target of 10%.

These figures bring the final outturn figure for the year to 19% against a target of 10%.

Procurement policy

The Procurement Act 2023 came into force during Q4 and the Policy Team led on ensuring this significant legislative change was embedded into the Council's Procurement and Supply Chain operations. This has included finalising the Procurement & Contract Standing Orders which were recently approved and included officer obligations with respect to Modern Slavery, Environmental Sustainability and Social Value. Internal governance changes have taken place and are being communicated to officers across all departments.

Further work on developing the Council's Social Value Model (SVM) has been undertaken following the previous update to Place Scrutiny Committee in September. This has included the creation of a Needs and Strategies tool which helps buyers to identify and target social value outcomes more closely aligned with existing Council priorities.

Highlights of the Policy Team's work over 2024/25 include:

- Successfully preparing the Council for the implementation of the Procurement Act and National Procurement Policy Statement.
- Drafting and embedding the Council's Supplier Code of Conduct in our procurements and contracts, which is a key practical lever of Council policies.
- Increasing the number of suppliers reporting carbon emissions and reduction plans to more than 50% of overall spend and a reduction of overall Scope 3 supplier emissions of more than 30% for 2023/24 (the latest annual data available) compared to the baseline year of 2022/23.
- Successfully implementing a trial of the SVM in Adult Social Care and Health procurements and reporting positive feedback from voluntary and charity sector organisations and commissioners on this qualitative approach to social value. This will lead to a wider development and roll-out of the SVM in due course.

Work is continuing to engage the care sector in East Sussex to deliver Modern Slavery training which has previously been rolled out successfully in Surrey and Brighton.

Contract and Commercial Advisory (CCA)

Much of the CCA's focus in Q4 was on ensuring the Council is compliant with the Contract Management obligations as prescribed in the Procurement Act 2023. As well as launching a new suite of guidance material and training, proactive engagements with the early affected projects are now underway. For 2025/26, the team's focus will remain on the regulations as we approach key new stages in the Procurement Act that will require careful consideration and action. This includes the publication of Contract Details Notices, which for some projects (£5m+) will require the publication of the contract Key Performance Indicators and a redacted copy of the contract itself. On top of this, the team will focus on Contract Assurance activities to begin providing the authority with the assurance that contracts are performing as required and that contract managers are appropriately trained, in line with the National Procurement Policy Statement.

Internal Audit

Through the delivery of sufficient audit coverage in Q4, the Chief Internal Auditor continues to be able to provide assurance over the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal control for the Council.

Internal Audit have continued to focus on delivery of the Annual Internal Audit Plan and were able to complete 95% of the plan to draft report stage by the end of Q4, against an annual target of 90%.

All high priority actions agreed with management as part of individual audit reviews are subject to action tracking, whereby we seek written confirmation from services that these have been implemented. As at the end of Q4, 14/15 (93.3%) of the agreed high-risk actions due to be implemented on a 12-month rolling basis have been actioned by management. The one outstanding action, relating to the need to introduce a declaration to the staff loan application process that requires staff to confirm that they have considered the affordability of the loan, has not yet been implemented. A revised implementation date has therefore been agreed.

Property

Following approval by the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change (LMRCC) in Q4 the Council acquired Eastbourne Borough Council's share of Pacific House, Eastbourne, and with Eastbourne Borough Council commenced marketing of the commercial development site, known as Site 6, adjacent to Pacific House. In March 2025, the LMRCC approved the grant of a lease of Sidley Depot to Rother District Council for their waste services, and approved the disposal of land linked to the development of the North Street Quarter in Lewes which enables the regeneration of a strategic brownfield site.

The Council continues to ensure its office hubs are used efficiently and during 2024/25 the space used for staff based at County Hall was rationalised and reduced. In Q4, the Council vacated both South and East blocks, which involved over 163 teams moving to remaining blocks (Central, North, and West). The vacant blocks are being advertised for office use, with marketing commencing in March 2025. The total work on office rationalisation across the corporate estate, including at Eastbourne and Hastings, has provided significant benefits to the Council including £1.050m of financial benefit, reductions in resource required to support ongoing facilities management and maintenance, and reductions in carbon emissions.

Two youth centre projects, funded by external capital funding from central government (Youth Investment Fund) are nearing completion. Works to the main structures of The Joff, Peacehaven, and Heathfield youth hubs were completed in Q4 and final fitout will take place in Q1 2025/26. In addition, planning permission was granted in Q4 for Hollington Youth Hub, which was funded by central government as part of Hastings Level Up Funding. Two Supported Living Adult Social Care capital projects were completed and became operational with clients moving in.

IT & Digital

Microsoft Copilot M365 discovery work was a focus for Q4. 33 pilots identified by a cross-Council working group are now underway to investigate how AI can be used safely and responsibly to enhance productivity and enable efficiencies. Webinars, workshops and 'prompt-a-thons' have been taking place throughout Q4 to support pilot participants in their contextual application of the technology. Usage is being monitored to enable evaluation of the relative benefits and these results will inform any business case that would be fed into the RPPR process.

Work to replace the Council's office and contact centre telephony platforms continued through Q4 and the Council's contact centres migrated onto the new platform during April. Remaining users of office telephones will move over to Microsoft Teams Telephony in Q1 2025/26. The proposed changes will modernise a key aspect of the Council's digital infrastructure – moving from desk-based landline phones to a digital service which is aligned to hybrid working. Mobile phone and other IT equipment use continued to be targeted as part of cost saving measures, supported by a communication campaign asking for unused smartphones and kit to be returned to IT & Digital. Work continues on the eligibility criteria for a corporate smartphone, with the aim being to reduce the number of smartphones used and in turn lower costs.

The Windows 11 device refresh project continued during Q4. With the end of support for Windows 10 approaching in October 2025, the project has passed its midpoint milestone, with over 3,000 devices now refreshed and staff experiencing the benefits of a faster device and upgraded operating system. Devices will now be refreshed every 5 years to extend the value of the assets. The scale at which this is done (across 3 councils through the Orbis Partnership) has many benefits and, in this case, a saving of 18% per device has been achieved through this joint procurement.

IT & Digital resources continued to support moves in conjunction with the office rationalisation work ongoing throughout Q4.

The migration of services to the new South East Grid (SEG) network on behalf of the Link Consortium is now complete. Hosted by the Council, the network allows the Council and other public sector organisations in the South East to access higher speed digital infrastructure connections and contributes to the provision of ultra-fast data network connectivity throughout East Sussex.

Our Strategic Digital Framework sets out how we will use technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our business processes. During 2024/25 we:

- reviewed our IT systems and upgraded these where possible to take advantage of advances in technology. However, there is a significant cost involved in replacing older systems, requiring cost/benefit judgements on a case-by-case basis.
- took part in benchmarking exercises to understand how well we are performing.
- adopted a data management framework to set best practice guidelines around data standards, data principles and data policy.
- maintained a set of clear and robust information governance processes to make sure data is kept safe and is shared and used appropriately.

Revenue Budget Summary

The 2024/25 Business Services net revenue budget is £30.753m. There were £1.003m planned savings in BSD for 2024/25 including £0.310m of unachieved savings brought forward from 2023/24 (ref ii). The impact of any unachieved savings is included within the current outturn forecast which is a £0.405m underspend (ref viii). In Business Administration and Finance – there was an underspend of £0.389m (ref iii) as the result of new grant income, higher than budgeted income for services and a reduction in expenditure. IT&D has an underspend of £0.145m (ref iv) because of reduced costs including staff vacancies and a £60k contract expense expected in 2024/25 that has slipped to 2025/26. In Procurement the balance of the unrealised £0.100m income target (ref v), will be offset from part of the underspend arising from a forecast reduction in

the required contribution to Orbis of £0.307m (ref vii). In Property there is a net overspend of £0.333m (ref vi) which is a reduction of over £0.300m since Q3. The main factors include; £0.240m overspend relating to St Mark's House as the Eastbourne estate had been planned to reduce in 2023/24, however the Council remained in the premises until October 2024; at Q3 there was a net £0.205m overspend on Reactive Maintenance due to Health & Safety Executive requests and essential equipment that had to be replaced. However, in Q4 spend was comparatively lower which has helped to improve the overall position. Overspends that Property were unable to mitigate during Q4 include a £0.140m net overspend on the PFI and Joint Use budgets. Finally, there have been areas of underspending; Surplus Properties had additional income of £0.129m due to the Mckinley Way Easement. Facilities Management had a favourable movement of £0.090m where a milder winter reduced gritting and utilities costs. £0.152m reduction in consultants being engaged, and some additional income relating to backdated lease renewals. £0.052m underspend on Cleaning and Waste Budgets. £0.072m underspend on the Property Staffing budget from vacancies that were kept on hold for the remainder of the financial year.

Capital Programme Summary

The 2024/25 capital budget is £39.059m. At Q4 there is a net £9.943m underspend (ref xviii) comprising the following variances: SALIX Contract - £0.256m underspend (ref ix) Salix Recycling ended in March 2025. Youth Investment Fund - £1.745m slippage (ref x) due to design changes and subsequent planning approvals needed to bring the project back within budget. Hollington Youth Centre - £0.327m slippage (ref xi) a main contractor has now been appointed, and the works were started but the majority has slipped into 2025/26. Special Educational Needs - Grove Park £0.232m slippage (ref xii) due to issues with site conditions and badger setts, works are now slipped into the next financial year. Core Programme - Schools Basic Need £0.368m underspend (ref xiii) £0.146m of the EY Childcare Wraparound grant will slip into 2025/26 and there is an underspend due to no further mobile classrooms being required after Q3. Core Programme -Capital Building Improvements Corporate - £0.875m net slippage (ref xiv) relates to slippage for St Marks dilapidations. Core Programme - Capital Building Improvements Schools - £1.033m slippage (ref xv) supply chain delays, lack of contractor capacity and adverse weather affected several projects, pushing them into 2025/26. Core Programme - IT & Digital Strategy Implementation - slippage of £2.191m (ref xvi) which relates to a change in approach to the Nutanix refresh (previously reported) and reprofiled spend on the device refresh project. Core Programme – Oracle – £2.622m slippage (ref xvii) as programme work continues into 2025/26 a portion of the expenditure will now be incurred in 2025/26.

Performance exceptions (Q4: RAG change since Q3)

Priority – Making best use of resources now and for the future

Performance measure	Outturn 23/24	Target 24/25	RAG Q1 24/25	RAG Q2 24/25	RAG Q3 24/25	RAG Q4 24/25	2024/25 outturn	Note ref
Reduce the amount of CO2 arising from County Council operations	36% reduction on baseline year (2019/20) emissions	50% reduction on baseline year (2019/20) emissions (emissions not to exceed 6,211 tonnes CO2e)	R	R	R	со	Emissions are reported a quarter in arrears Q3: projected reduction by year end: 36% reduction on baseline year	i

Savings exceptions 2024/25 (£'000)

Service description	Original Target For 2024/25	Target including items c/f from previous year(s)	Achieved in-year	Will be achieved, but in future years	Cannot be achieved	Note ref
Planned savings – BSD Property	593	803	803	-	-	
Planned savings – BSD IT&D	100	100	100	-	-	
Planned savings – Orbis Procurement		100	100	-	-	
Total Savings	693	1,003	1,003	-	_	ii
			-	-	-	
			-	-	-	
Subtotal Permanent Changes 1			0	0	0	·
Total Savings and Permanent Changes	693	1,003	1,003	-	0	

Memo: treatment of savings not achieved in the year (£'000)	Temporary Funding ²	Part of reported variance ³	Total	Note Ref
Property	-	-	-	
Procurement	-	-	-	
	-	-	-	
Total	-	-	-	

¹ Where agreed savings are reasonably unable to be achieved other permanent savings are required to be identified and approved via quarterly monitoring.

²Temporary funding will only replace a slipped or unachieved saving for one year; the saving will still need to be made in future years (or be replaced with something else).

³ The slipped or unachieved saving will form part of the department's overall variance - it will either increase an overspend or decrease an underspend. The saving will still need to be made in future years (or be replaced with something else).

Revenue Budget 2024/25 (£'000)

Divisions	Planned Gross	Planned Income	Planned Net	2024/25 Gross	2024/25 Income	2024/25 Net	(Over)/ under spend Gross	(Over)/ under spend Income	(Over)/ under spend Net	Note ref
Finance and Bus Admin	13,156	(6,517)	6,639	13,979	(7,729)	6,250	(823)	1,212	389	iii
HR & OD	3,407	(1,107)	2,300	3,597	(1,286)	2,311	(190)	179	(11)	
IT & Digital	13,212	(4,132)	9,080	15,083	(6,148)	8,935	(1,871)	2,016	145	iv
Procurement	62	(100)	(38)	70	(16)	54	(8)	(84)	(92)	V
Property	26,882	(17,895)	8,987	30,290	(20,970)	9,320	(3,408)	3,075	(333)	vi
Contribution to Orbis	3,785	-	3,785	3,478	-	3,478	307	-	307	vii
TOTAL BSD	60,504	(29,751)	30,753	66,497	(36,149)	30,348	(5,993)	6,398	405	viii

Capital programme 2024/25 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget 2024/25		(Over) /	Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend	Variation analysis: Slippage to future year	Variation analysis: Spend in advance	Note
SALIX Contract	350	350	350	94	256	1		-	ix
Lansdowne Unit (CSD)	39	39	39	1	38	38	-	-	
Youth Investment Fund	7,003	7,003	7,203	5,458	1,745	-	1,745		X
Hollington Youth Centre	-	-	663	336	327	-	327	-	Хİ
Hastings & Rother Skills LUP	ı	ı	1,000	907	93		93	-	
Hastings and Rother LUP Minibus	70	70	70	-	70	-	70	-	
Sidley Family Hub	90	90	90	90	-	-	-	-	
Sorrell Drive Refurbishment	165	165	165	165		-	-	-	
Special Educational Needs	2,510	2,510	560	522	38	46	9	(17)	
Special Educational Needs - Grove Park	17,120	17,120	1,300	1,068	232	-	232	_	xii
Special Provision in Secondary School (Priory and Robertsbridge)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Disabled Children's Homes	189	189	24	10	14		14		
14 Westfield Lane	17	17	17	-	17	-	17	-	
Core Programme - Schools Basic Need	61,874	61,874	600	232	368	222	146	-	xiii
Core Programme - Capital Building Improvements Corporate	45,482	45,482	4,401	3,526	875	-	875	-	xiv
Pacific House	713	713	713	713	-	-	-	-	
Core Programme - Capital Building Improvements Schools	40,401	40,401	5,097	4,064	1,033	-	1,033	-	xv
Core Programme - IT & Digital Strategy Implementation	71,234	71,234	7,399	5,208	2,191	-	2,191	-	xvi
Core Programme - IT & Digital Strategy Implementation Oracle	26,513	26,513	9,344	6,722	2,622	-	2,622	_	xvii
IT & Digital - Utilising Automation	24	24	24	-	24	-	24	-	
Total BSD Gross	273,794	273,794	39,059	29,116	9,943	562	9,398	(17)	xviii