

## **Children's Services – Q1 2025/26**

### **Summary of progress on Council Priorities, issues arising, and achievements**

#### **Early Help and Social Care**

##### **Transformation**

The transformation programme is making good progress responding to the series of reforms included in the Government's Families First Partnership programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The following progress has been made:

- **Earlier Intervention** – the recruitment of Team Around the Family Co-ordinators is underway and the communications and engagement work is beginning advertising the Professional Help Line, both of which will be launched September/October 2025. This resource, alongside the Family Hubs, will provide support to key partners to help families at an earlier stage and avoid the need for specialist services.
- **Family Help** – we are taking a phased approach to the integration of early help keywork with social work teams. The first phase of these changes will launch in January/February 2026 with our Family Help teams based in Eastbourne. The structure and configuration of teams has been agreed and staff involved have been briefed.
- **Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams** – we are in the early stages of planning for this part of the reforms, working closely with our partners in Health and the Police. A pan-Sussex Strategic Transformation Group has been established as part of the Safeguarding Children Partnership governance arrangements to ensure strategic input from partners during this design and planning phase.
- **Family Network Approach** – this new focus will support family led plans continuing work on a draft model, guidance and workforce development offer which will be developed and finalised over the summer. This is building on our well embedded Family Group Conferencing model in East Sussex.

##### **Family and Youth Hubs**

The Government's Youth Investment Fund programme to improve Youth Hubs in East Sussex is nearing completion. Heathfield Youth Hub will be a new multipurpose facility for children and young people serving Heathfield and the surrounding villages. The Joff Youth Hub, situated in Peacehaven, is undergoing a major extension and refit and will serve the Havens. Both Youth Hubs are expected to open in Q2.

Major refurbishment works on the Hollington Youth Hub began in April 2025 following a capital grant from the Government Work should be completed Feb 2026.

During the closures the Youth work programmes have been delivered from local community venues.

The new and refurbished Hubs will deliver a range of activity programmes and support services for young people that focus on emotional and physical well-being, delivered by the Council and a range of partner organisations.

##### **Child in Need (CIN) cases and Child Protection Plans (CPP)**

Child in Need numbers remain broadly stable at 951 (June 2025) plus 152 children allocated to Children's Disability Service. This reflects the number of children having their Child Protection Plans stepped down to Child in Need plans whilst the volume of new cases coming from the Duty and Assessment Team (DAT) remains relatively high in Q1.

Our proportion of Child in Need Plans that have been open for at least 9 months has remained stable at 27% (256 plans). As at June 2025, 87% of Child in Need cases had a visit within the required timescales of 30 days.

Child Protection Plan levels have reduced to 579 at end of Q1 (547 plus 11 unborn children), down from 614 in Q4 2024/25. This has been achieved through effective multi-disciplinary work with children and families, reducing risk and effecting change with families.

Child Protection Plan visits within 20 days from referral remain stable at 93% (June 2025), meaning that we are confident that children are being seen and spoken to by social workers, who use visits to progress children's plans.

### **Connected Practice**

Significant progress has been made through the development and upcoming launch of Practice Lead programmes in Motivational Interviewing, Attachment, and Reunification—each designed to strengthen our model of Connected Practice. These programmes, set to launch in the autumn, reflect our commitment to embedding evidence-informed approaches across our work.

### **Connected Families**

The Connected Coaches team work with young people (aged 11+) who are identified as being on the edge of care or are being supported back into the care of their family. This work is informed by multidisciplinary planning and intensive support delivered by a team of connected coaches and clinical practitioners. Alongside an allocated Social Worker, the team plan and deliver interventions that support the young person and address parent/carers needs and wider systemic issues. The aim is to reduce risk, increase stability and promote the care of young people within their family.

In Q1 the Connected Coaches team successfully concluded interventions with 10 young people supporting them to remain living within their family network. Achieving increased stability for these young people improved their outcomes and avoided the need for them to become looked after (achieving a cost avoidance of £1.073m based on a 12-month placement projection). The team also made a saving of £0.023m through supporting a young person to be reunified home, a key future focus for the team. 93% of young people worked with in 2024/25 have sustained living within their families.

The Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) are adult focused specialist practitioners, delivering support and interventions with parents/carers experiencing domestic abuse, problematic mental health and/or problematic drug and alcohol use. These are parents and carers of children open to Children's Social Care on Children in Need or Child Protection Plans. The team are working with parents across the county with the aim of providing dedicated support to address their personal issues to support families to stay together and improve the wellbeing and life chances of children.

In Q1, we successfully concluded interventions with 78% of families we worked with. Parents/carers were supported to achieve stability in relation to their mental health, drug and alcohol use, safety from abuse or causing others harm. A recent audit showed that CFIP was involved with 73% of families who were stepped down from Child Protection to Child in Need plans in Q1. Engagement and outcome rates remain high which indicates the positive impact the CFIP practitioners are having when addressing key issue affecting parents and carers.

### **Rate of Looked After Children (LAC) (per 10,000 children) (ref i)**

The LAC rate at the end of Q1 was 67.1 (695 children) this remains below the national average rate for England (73.9, Q4 2024-25) and IDACI (expected rates based on levels of deprivation) at 70.0, Q4 2023-24. The rate is above our statistical neighbours (62.8, Q4 2024-25).

56 children entered care in Q1, with 47 children discharged. The admissions were made up of several large sibling groups, some smaller sibling groups of 2 and 3, a small number of single children and 4 separated children, being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Of this cohort 27 were accommodated through Section 20 (s20) of the Children's Act, 7 were admitted to care through emergency orders and 22 entered care through planned Care Proceedings. The demand for s20 looked after children admissions for adolescents with complex needs across mental health, special educational needs and social care continues to be the most challenging area across the service from a practice and cost perspective.

As part of our approach to enabling more children to live safely with their families, the service has been focused on supporting children to be reunited with their families or wider network where it is possible to do so. In Q1, 17 children were successfully reunified with family/friends. All children supported under s20 are regularly considered in terms of options to support reunification/step down through the Valuing Care Panel. A refreshed reunification framework has recently been developed, based on nationally recognised best practice, to support the service in maximising these arrangements. When children do need to come into our care the Valuing Care Panel supports the plans for our children to live in the right placement, for the right length of time and remove any barriers where necessary.

## **Mockingbird**

The Mockingbird Family Model consists of a "constellation" of foster homes, including a "hub" home that provides support, resources, and planned and emergency respite care to the other "satellite" homes. The core aim is to improve placement stability, strengthen relationships between foster carers, children, and young people, and to create a more positive experience of care by reducing isolation and enhancing support systems.

East Sussex's first Mockingbird constellation was launched at the end of March 2025. This was funded through a Department for Education (DfE) grant. Mockingbird families share experience and understanding, celebrate successes, and support each other through challenging times. The Home Hub carers arrange monthly meetings and social events such as lunches, picnics and fun activities to bring people together. They also provide day care and offer short breaks for children and young people.

## **Discovery Child Initiative (Specialist Services)**

The Discovery Child initiative aims to reduce harm to child victims of exploitation and harm caused by perpetrators, whilst reducing risk to children on the periphery of exploitation. This is being done through early identification, multi-agency information sharing, rapid intervention, safeguarding and work to disrupt the sexual and criminal exploitation of children and young people, break the cycle of abuse and send a signal to perpetrators about the consequences of their actions.

Through strong partnership working with Sussex Police and other partners, we have achieved a three-week reduction in the time taken for an intelligence submission to be evaluated and actions set, from 28 days in March 2024 prior to the pilot starting, to 7 days. 26 joint Police and Social Care visits have been offered to vulnerable children and a total of 85 criminal disruptions against child exploitation were achieved in 2024/25 (up from 18 in 2023/24). This is the highest number of recorded Police disruptions across both Sussex and Surrey. This positive work has enabled the number of successful child protection disruptions to increase from 11 in 2023/24 to 59 in 2024/25.

Contextual safeguarding measures have been deployed in Police led operations recently within Hailsham and Eastbourne. This has resulted in criminal and child protection disruptions, including the identification and charging of adult drug dealers and the reductions of criminal offending, following 61 disruptions across both towns.

## **Health and Wellbeing Project for care experienced young people**

This project provides care experienced young people with opportunities to participate in activities that benefit their mental wellbeing by providing access to Personal Health Budgets and links to community provision. As well as seeking to improve care experienced young people's health and wellbeing outcomes the programme aims to deliver earlier intervention/support and reduce the need for escalation into mental health services. Young people co-produce their Health and Wellbeing plans. A Mental Health Nurse Specialist is based in the team providing direct support to young people with a focus on supporting them to manage their mental health, particularly the impact of trauma, self-esteem, anxiety and isolation related issues.

The project has supported over 350 young people during the last three years. The evaluation of the project has shown significant improvements in participants physical health, mood, motivation and sleep as well as reduced social isolation. Having a creative, flexible and responsive approach

that can remove some of the barriers to accessing community resources remains a work in progress as part of this project.

## **Education**

### **East Sussex Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection Improvement Plan**

Following the Area SEND Inspection in November 2024 and the publication of the inspection report in February 2025 the East Sussex local partnership (the Council and NHS Sussex) were required to update their strategic plans to address the recommendations from the report. The Area SEND Inspection Improvement Plan was published in April 2025, and the existing SEND strategy has been extended to the end of 2025/26 academic year.

#### **Improving Alternative Provision in East Sussex**

Significant progress is being made on transforming the Alternative Provision offer in East Sussex. We have continued to work closely with the London South East Academy Trust (LSEAT) in preparation for the launch of the East Sussex Academy provision in September. During Q1, LSEAT have been working with primary and secondary schools to deliver outreach work to pupils at risk of exclusion. LSEAT have also provided provision and support directly to 40 excluded pupils who have been out of education for up to 2 years. They successfully secured engagement from over 80% of these pupils who have now gone on roll of the satellite provision run by East Sussex Academy.

The local authority has worked with partners in the Alternative Provision sub-group, and consulted widely with stakeholders, to develop our Alternative Provision Strategic Plan. This sets out our ambition for children who need to access alternative provision. The Plan will be used to ensure alternative provision delivers positive educational and progression outcomes for young people. It will also ensure that the significant resources the local authority and educational settings commit to alternative provision are joined up across the system and that children and young people get the right support at the right time.

#### **SEND Supporting Transition**

All children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) have an annual review to determine how well the provision and support in the plan is being delivered and whether any changes are required. The EHCP Transitions Service supports schools with the review process for children in priority year groups to ensure that the review is person-centred and supports planning for transition to the next phase of education or adulthood. In Q1, the practitioners have undertaken 295 annual reviews, the majority for Year 6, Year 9 and college pupils.

There has been overwhelmingly positive feedback about the EHCP Transitions Service. Some of the highlights from evaluations received are:

- 93% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they had the opportunity to share their views within the annual review and that their needs, feelings and wishes were listened to
- 100% of settings strongly agreed the annual review was person-centred
- 100% of settings agreed or strongly agreed that the annual review focused on the child/young person's future aspirations
- 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt prepared ahead of this meeting
- 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident about the next steps following this meeting

#### **School Admissions**

National Offer Day for primary phase admissions was on 16 April 2025. This year 91.2% of East Sussex residents who applied on time were offered their first preference, and 98.0% were offered one of their preferences. This figure is slightly down on the previous year when 93.7% of East

Sussex residents who applied on time were offered their first preference, and 98.8% were offered one of their preferences. The reason for this slight drop is largely because of changes in parental preference for different schools which sometimes means that specific schools have more applications than places available. Overall primary school pupil numbers are decreasing and as a result schools are concerned about low pupil numbers. We continue to work closely with schools on their future sustainability through our Small Schools Strategy.

### **Expanding Places in Early Years**

The Early Years Funding team works closely with parent/carers, early years providers and other agencies to ensure the take up of the DfE's free early education entitlement for three- and four-year-olds. During Q1, four schools in East Sussex were informed by the DfE that their bids for capital funds to establish a school-based nursery were successful. Chyngton Primary School, Little Common Church of England Primary School, Pashley Down Infant school and Pevensey and Westham School will all receive capital funding of up to £150K to set up a nursery. The team have been supporting the schools to get ready for opening. These new nurseries will help increase the number of places available for families to access funded early education and childcare places.

During Q1, the team have also been supporting voluntary run provisions to look at moving to Community Interest Companies. These provide a more sustainable and robust business model for the voluntary sector. This includes offering drop-in sessions for trustees/committee members. In June a marketing campaign was launched to promote the use of wraparound provision and to also promote the use of working families tax credits to support with the cost of childcare.

### **Proportion of all new EHC Plans issued within 20 weeks (ref ii)**

#### **(a) Including Exception Cases**

#### **(b) Excluding Exception Cases**

Of all new EHC Plans issued during Q1; (a) 42.3% (52 out of 123) including exceptions and (b) 43.0% (52 out of 121) excluding exceptions were issued within statutory timescales. These compare with figures for the comparative period last year of (a) 74.6% (91 out of 122) including exceptions and (b) 74.6% (91 out of 122) excluding exceptions.

Since Q3 2024/25 we have seen a steady decline in timescale performance due to late statutory advice from partners in Health and Social Care. This is primarily as a result of staffing issues and, in relation to social care advice, high volume of demand in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). A significant amount of work has been undertaken to streamline the process for professionals and work is underway to recruit new staff to the MASH. Timeliness of advice is included as an area of focus in the Area SEND Inspection Improvement Plan, so this is a priority for the Council. There is considerable risk to performance in this area due to the broader demands and capacity pressures for statutory partners. The number of requests for plans continues to rise, and anticipation of SEND reform is driving further demand.

### **Communications Planning and Performance**

#### **Partnership working**

A new [Multi-Agency Neglect Toolkit](#) has been created to support the needs of a wide range of professionals in their work with children and young people. The Council's Practice Educator has collaborated with professional stakeholders to ensure that professionals in education, health and early help and social care can access a new model of practice and carry out work that is a priority across the county. The toolkit now includes standardised documents for assessing neglect and resources specific to different professions.

### **Revenue Budget Summary**

Based on current financial modelling, the Q1 predicted outturn for the end of 2025/26 is £174.724m. This is a forecast year-end overspend of £16.664m (**ref xvi**).

In 2025/26 CSD has a net budget of £158.060m. There has been £13.301m additional budget given for growth and inflation, however £3.239m has been removed for permanent savings (**ref**

**ix).** This equates to a net increase of £10.062m. This year, all £3.239m of savings have been achieved.

CSD's year-end outturn for 2024/25 was £157.585m. This was against a budget of £146.985m, representing a £13.647m overspend. The CSD 2024/25 Q1 forecast was £157.375m, only £0.210m less than the final outturn figure. This shows the accuracy and consistency of the forecasting throughout the year.

The main financial pressure continues to come from the statutory demand-driven areas of Looked After Children, Child Protection, and Home to School Transport.

Not included in the figures reported above is the position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which, in accordance with the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2020, is required by local authorities to be shown on their balance sheets. As of 31 March 2025, East Sussex has a cumulative surplus of £2.837m, which is very unusual, as most local authorities have significant deficits. However, there is an in-year forecast deficit of £19.133m on the DSG, which will result in an overall deficit by the end of 2025/26. £15.196m of the overspend is related to costs of provision for children with Education & Health Care Plans. The statutory override has been extended until March 2028, at which point any deficit will then be offset against useable council reserves.

### **Commissioning and Transformation overspend of £12.284m (ref xiii)**

Commissioning and Transformation is a new division in which all LAC placement expenditure sits. It has a budget of £69.600m and forecast expenditure of £81.884m at the end of 2025/26, based on current financial modelling.

£1.593m savings have been approved to come from the division this year at budget-setting and it is set to achieve them (**ref iii**). This is down to the early intervention workstreams Valuing Care and Connected Coaches. Both programmes have aimed to stepdown looked after children from high-cost placements into placements which meets their needs at a lower cost, or where possible, to reunify the children with their families.

#### Looked After Children placements

For 2025/26 a budget of £52.183m has been set for LAC placements. £1.000m of this budget is being transferred to pay for the Connected Families teams in Specialist Services, which are focused on prevention activity to support children to remain living with their families. A further £0.100m budget will be contributed to the South-East Regional Care Co-operative (RCC), which has been established to enhance regional commissioning, improve market shaping, and ensure there are sufficient placements to meet the needs of children in care.

LAC placements remain the largest financial pressure within Children's Services, with a Q1 overspend forecast of £12.109m for 2025/26. At the end of 2024/25, the LAC placement overspend was £9.087m.

£15.058m overspend is forecast on agency residential and secure placements, with £0.109m underspend forecast on agency foster carers, £2.465m underspend on agency semi-independent living, and £0.287m underspend forecast on in-house East Sussex foster carers.

The rate of LAC has remained reasonably consistent since the start of 2024/25 at 67 per 10 000, equating to 695 children. This is below the average for England (73.9), and below the expected IDACI rate (70), however is higher than the statistical neighbour average of 62.8. The rate of children entering care has been relatively consistent over the past four years with a slight increase last year, however the rate of children ceasing to be looked after has reduced in the last year and is lower than the England and statistical neighbour rate. This is an area of focus for the service and it is what the financial modelling and forecast overspend is currently based on.

In-depth analysis, modelling and planning has been undertaken for the LAC budget forecast across Children's Services and finance. The 2025/26 forecast includes several assumptions:

- Costs have been calculated based on service level intelligence on each child in terms of what may change in terms of placement (e.g. forecasted end dates, step downs, reunifications and



those turning 18). A risk with this model is that placement step downs may not be achievable given the sufficiency challenges nationally, or that children's needs change.

- An estimate for growth has been included in the forecast (£4.488m). This is based on local and national trends, particularly recognising the increasing pressures regarding adolescents with complex needs. This also considers the changes in placement mix we have seen with an increasing percentage of children requiring residential and specialist provision, the increase in costs we are experiencing in supported accommodation market since Ofsted registration became mandatory, and the reductions (a national and local trend) in foster carer sufficiency. A further significant factor is the increase in price across all placement types.
- A 3.4% inflationary increase has been forecast across all care providers for 2025/26. This equates to around £1.926m. Providers are increasingly challenging regarding inflationary increases and they seek higher annual uplifts due to national insurance costs and operational costs. Blanket uplifts are not applied in Children's Services and negotiation takes place on all placements.

The service is ambitious to realise a 3% reduction in LAC numbers this year. It should not be assumed that this will translate to an equivalent 3% reduction in costs across all placement types, as it is more likely that reunifications will be achieved for children in lower cost placements.

The rationale for the projected increase in costs for 2025/26 is provided below:

- 16 children with very high levels of need entered care into high-cost placements in 2024/25. The total 2024/25 forecast for these 16 unplanned entries to high-cost placements was £8.727m. Most of these children entered care in Q3 2024/25 and 7 of these children were included in the top 10 highest cost placements as at the end of 2024/25. These 7 children remain in the top 10 of the highest cost placements (as at the end of Q1 2025/26) due to their complexity of needs (these include children entering care from hospital and adoption breakdowns). These 7 children in high-cost placements are forecast to cost £8.178m in 2025/26. The risk remains of children who are currently unknown to the service entering into care from hospital, youth justice settings, or adoption breakdowns throughout this year and it is hard to quantify a forecast for the unknowns.
- Increase in the number of children in residential provision. In Q1 2024/25, 113 children were placed in residential children's homes (16.5% of all LAC), in Q1 2025/26 this has increased to 130 children (19% of all LAC). This relates to the needs of the children but also the lack of sufficiency in foster carers meaning that children who are suitable for foster care are in some cases having to be placed in residential provision.
- Increase in cost and complexity of the top 20 highest-cost placements in the past 12 months. There has been an 8% increase (from £14,831 per week to an average of £16,063 per week) in the past year, and a 43% increase in the length of placements. These placements are for adolescents with a high complexity of need across social care, health and education. Many children have emotional/mental health concerns, increasing numbers have a neurodiverse profile, and behaviours that challenge. A number require deprivation of liberty orders to ensure appropriate levels of safeguarding. The service has a small number of children currently placed in Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered settings due to the level of need, with no Ofsted registered provision being able to meet needs. These 3.2% (20 children) of LAC numbers, excluding Separated Children, contribute to 21% of the total LAC placement spend, excluding Separated Children.
- Increase in the average price of all placements. This is particularly significant in relation to placements costing over £10,000 per week. In Q1 2024/25, 15 children were in placements over £10,000 per week. This has increased to 21 in Q1 2025/26. This is a national trend as recently highlighted in a report by the Local Government Association. This equates to a weekly increased spend of £105,741 (this would total £5.498m if assumed to continue for the full year).

The following action is being undertaken to mitigate costs and reduce pressure.

- Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) – this service has achieved a reduction in children subject to child protection planning in Q1 2025/26. In 2024/25 CFIP delivered £0.650m savings through reunifying children with families, and £6.019m cost avoidance through enabling children on the edge of care to remain living safely within their families. £1.861m cost avoidance has been achieved in 2025/26 through safely reducing the number of children on Child Protection plans and Children In Need plans, this has supported avoidance of children requiring care. This work will further support the reduction in the rate of children becoming looked after and will further contribute to reunification planning.
- Maintained delivery of successful Foundations programme (aimed at avoiding repeat care proceedings for parents/carers who have had children previously removed from their care), Family Group Conferencing and support for Kinship carers.
- Further embedding Valuing Care approach. This has achieved £3.718m of savings to date through step downs and reunifications. Further workforce development and integration into care planning and fostering assessment is underway. Valuing Care panels focus on plans for children and multi-disciplinary working to remove barriers to transition of placements.
- New 'Heading Home' strategy developed to support reunification planning and monitoring.
- A commissioning and placements service was established in 2024/25, with increased capacity. The service is focused on improved market management, challenging provider costs and working at a regional level with the RCC to improve placement sufficiency and management across the South East. It is engaged in local frameworks which are being strengthened through the RCC. Development work is underway with Integrated Care Board's regarding integrated commissioning models to establish consistency.

Income from NHS Sussex has been included in the forecast to jointly fund placements that support the health needs of a small number of looked after children. Work is taking place to continue to increase the level of health contributions to children's care packages.

The Commissioned Services budget will underspend by £0.068m this year due to the suspension of contributions of £0.240m to the NHS this year, with the CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) adoption service to be delivered in-house and funded from this budget at a cost of £0.100m (a reduction from £0.112m when provided externally), therefore there is a total saving of £0.140m in this area for 2025/26.

Children's Disability Service (CDS) Placements will overspend by £0.245m, with £0.092m small mitigations against the £0.337m pressure in short-term agency placements for children with disabilities. The pressure is including uplifts in fees charged by providers and new commitments for children.

### **Early Help and Social Care overspend of £2.847m (ref xii)**

Early Help and Social Care has a budget of £45.268m and forecast expenditure of £48.115m at the end of 2025/26.

£0.100m savings were approved to come from the division this year and it is set to achieve them **(ref viii)**. This is from a higher level of funding received via the Children and Families grant this year.

The Early Help service is reporting a £0.296m overspend due to Keyworker staffing. A recruitment freeze is in place in order to alleviate the pressure.

The portion of the Looked After Children budget related to staffing sits within Early Help & Social Care. This is currently forecast to be £0.364m overspent, but this will be further scrutinised throughout the year.

Locality Social Work and Family Assessment is forecasting a £1.736m overspend. £1.280m of this is related to salaries of staff members hired to meet demand within the statutory area of Child Protection. The Council is looking at ways of reducing this spend, such as holding vacancies and



reducing the number of newly qualified social workers who are hired. Of the forecast salary spend, only £0.012m is related to agency social workers, with the rest being permanent. East Sussex has one of the lowest levels of agency social workers in the country.

There is £0.695m pressure in Locality relating to accommodation costs for vulnerable families and children, the most significant pressure relates to the Intentionally Homeless families which the Local Authority has a statutory duty towards.

There is a £0.450m pressure within Connected Families (Specialist Services), due to previous invest to save funding being fully utilised in 2024/25. This service is considered essential in delivering cost avoidance and savings through preventive interventions and supporting reunification. It is also key to the Government's social care reforms through the Families First Programme.

There is £2.929m set aside within the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the Localities/Family Help pressure in 2026/27. If available next year, this will help towards the known pressures within the area. In the meantime, there is a plan in place to reduce staffing overspends through natural wastage and staff turnover.

There is £0.031m overspend forecast within the Management team and £0.028m underspend forecast within Separated Children.

### **Communication, Planning and Performance (including Home to School Transport) overspend of £1.462m (ref xv)**

Communication, Planning and Performance has a budget of £33.369m and forecast expenditure of £34.831m at the end of 2025/26.

£0.957m savings were approved to come from the division this year and it is currently set to achieve £0.468m in this financial year and £0.489m in future years. An array of cost reduction measures is taking place within Home to School Transport (see below), which will increase the achieved savings figure throughout the year.

Outdoor Education is forecast to overspend by £0.079m, as the transfer of Buzz Active to Bedes has not yet been agreed but the saving (**ref v**) was deducted from the budget at the beginning of the year. In year mitigations are being sought including staffing structures and management of activity equipment in relation to both sales and purchasing.

There is £0.003m underspend forecast in Planning and Performance, £0.008m overspend forecast in Safeguarding, and £0.053m underspend forecast within Equalities and Participation.

Home to School Transport has a forecast overspend of £1.434m. The forecasts are calculated based on an extrapolated model of current and previous clients, with a growth figure added for recent applications, and an assumption made about unrecoverable income owed by other Local Authorities.

Due to conflicting Government legislation, Local Authorities can take different stances on who pays for looked after children who are placed in and have transport provided by other Authorities. East Sussex aligns with the Education Belongings Regulations 1996 but has now adopted a reciprocal position with the authorities it interacts with.

Of the forecast £29.602m spend, 62% relates to clients with SEND. Spend on these clients is set to increase by 10% from 2024/25. This is linked both to EHCP numbers and unit costs increasing. The increases have slowed since 2023/24, when there was a 19% increase in pupil numbers and 15% increase in unit costs. However, the numbers are set to increase again by 13% this year and the unit costs by 5%. The increase in unit costs is dictated by general inflation as well as the higher National Insurance contributions paid for drivers this year.

Significant work has gone into implementing cost reduction measures within the Home to School Transport service. Plans to optimise routes for the new academic year are underway, with 450 out of 663 taxi and minibus routes having been reviewed. The focus has been on the 25 schools where 75% of SEND pupils are being transported. As a result of this work, there will be 50 fewer routes across 16 optimised schools and 8 fewer taxis. The savings on taxis have been calculated

at £0.200m per year (**ref vi**), and work is ongoing to quantify the results of the rest of the work which is why we anticipate increasing the amount of savings.

Solo routes have been reviewed and there was a reduction of 56 solo routes in July. Most of this is down to leavers, with some down to the optimisation work. There are 211 remaining solo routes, with SEND pupils accounting for 143 of these. There are also 23 Further Education students on solo routes and 23 Alternative Provision students.

A new Personal Transport Budget strategy has been rolled out and 184 families have been contacted with the enhanced offer. To date, a small number of families have accepted and been transferred from a solo taxi contract, resulting in £0.146m annual saving (also included in **ref vi**). This is combined with the £0.200m saving mentioned above to produce the total reported saving of £0.346m.

### **Education overspend of £0.303m (ref xiv)**

Education has a budget of £154.634m and forecast outturn expenditure of £154.937m at the end of 2025/26.

£0.360m savings were approved to come from the division this year and it is set to achieve them (**ref iv**). This has been achieved through a review of staffing and resources across several education teams, along with a reduction in spend on external consultants.

There is £0.205m overspend within the SEND and Safeguarding service. £0.105m of this is for staffing required to deal with the level of demand in the Elective Home Education team, and £0.100m is attributed to agency staff to deal with the demand in the Assessment & Planning team.

Participation and Planning is showing an overspend of £0.126m as a result of both staffing costs and feasibility studies related to works in schools which don't go ahead and can't then be capitalised.

Inclusion and Partnerships is showing an underspend of £0.026m due to their reduction in spend on consultants for schools requiring support.

### **Central Resources underspend of £0.232m (ref xi)**

Central Resources has a budget of £1.279m and forecast expenditure of £1.047m at the end of 2025/26.

Whilst savings of £0.229m were approved as part of budget-setting (**ref vii**), the division has been able to identify savings of £0.107m this year and £0.122m in future years. £0.102m of this year's savings are down to planned underspends in the new attendance function (**ref x**). An additional saving related to the consolidation of back-office functions is taking place but the restructures required won't occur until after 2025/26.

Within this area, £0.177m academisation reserve funding and £0.040m Supported Families funding is being drawn down on in year.

### **Capital Programme Summary (ref xxx)**

The total capital budget for 2025/26 is £2.429m and the forecast spend is £2.908m, an overspend of £0.479m (**ref xviii**).

The overspend is due to the Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children (**ref xvii**). There is no budget set for this programme this year, but it is demand-led and statutory. East Sussex provides top-up funding towards projects which are funded from the Disabled Facilities Grant managed by the district and borough councils within East Sussex. The projects are for the provision of suitable facilities in private residences to enable disabled children to remain living with their families. The £0.479m overspend is due to a backlog of adaptations agreed in prior financial years.

All other projects are forecast to budget.

## Performance exceptions

Performance measure	Outturn 24/25	Target 25/26	RAG Q1 25/26	RAG Q2 25/26	RAG Q3 25/26	RAG Q4 25/26	Q1 outturn	Note ref
Rate of Looked After Children (per 10,000 children)	66.7 (691 children)	64.7 (670 children)	R				67.1 (695 children) 60.7 (629 children excl Separated Children)	i
Proportion of all new EHC Plans issued within 20 weeks (a) Including Exception Cases (b) Excluding Exception Cases	(a) 68.5% (b) 71.3%	(a) 65% (b) 70%	R				(a) 42.3% (b) 43.0%	ii

## Savings exceptions 2025/26 (£'000)

Service description	Original Target For 2025/26	Target including items c/f from previous year(s)	Achieved in-year	Will be achieved, but in future years	Cannot be achieved	Note ref
Looked After Children	1,593	1,593	1,593	-	-	iii
Education	360	360	360	-	-	iv
Buzz Active	107	107	-	107	-	v
Home to School Transport	728	728	346	382	-	vi
All divisions	229	229	5	122	102	vii
Supporting Families programme	100	100	200	-	-	viii
Communication, Planning and Performance	122	122	122	-	-	
<b>Total Savings</b>	<b>3,239</b>	<b>3,239</b>	<b>2,526</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>ix</b>
Attendance			102	-	-	x
All divisions			-	-	(102)	
<b>Subtotal Permanent Changes <sup>1</sup></b>			<b>102</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(102)</b>	
<b>Total Savings and Permanent Changes</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,628</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>0</b>	

Memo: treatment of savings not achieved in the year (£'000)	Temporary Funding <sup>2</sup>	Part of reported variance <sup>3</sup>	Total	Note Ref
Savings underachieved in-year	-	611	611	
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>611</b>	

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

<sup>2</sup> Temporary 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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 2025/26 (£'000)**

<b>Divisions</b>	<b>Planned Gross</b>	<b>Planned Income</b>	<b>Planned Net</b>	<b>2025/26 Gross</b>	<b>2025/26 Income</b>	<b>2025/26 Net</b>	<b>(Over)/ under spend Gross</b>	<b>(Over)/ under spend Income</b>	<b>(Over)/ under spend Net</b>	<b>Note ref</b>
Central Resources	3,116	(1,837)	1,279	3,061	(2,014)	1,047	55	177	232	<b>xi</b>
Early Help and Social Care	57,503	(12,235)	45,268	64,344	(16,229)	48,115	(6,841)	3,994	(2,847)	<b>xii</b>
Commissioning and Transformation	75,423	(5,823)	69,600	90,599	(8,715)	81,884	(15,176)	2,892	(12,284)	<b>xiii</b>
Education	306,241	(151,607)	154,634	307,964	(153,027)	154,937	(1,723)	1,420	(303)	<b>xiv</b>
Communication, Planning and Performance	37,621	(4,252)	33,369	39,733	(4,902)	34,831	(2,112)	650	(1,462)	<b>xv</b>
Schools	158,386	(158,386)	-	158,386	(158,386)	-	-	-	-	
DSG Non Schools	-	(146,090)	(146,090)	-	(146,090)	(146,090)	-	-	-	
<b>Total CSD</b>	<b>638,290</b>	<b>(480,230)</b>	<b>158,060</b>	<b>664,087</b>	<b>(489,363)</b>	<b>174,724</b>	<b>(25,797)</b>	<b>9,133</b>	<b>(16,664)</b>	<b>xvi</b>

## **Capital programme 202/26 (£'000)**

<b>Approved project</b>	<b>Budget: total project all years</b>	<b>Projected: total project all years</b>	<b>Budget 2025/26</b>	<b>Actual 2025/26</b>	<b>Variation (Over) / under 2025/26 budget</b>	<b>Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend</b>	<b>Variation analysis: Slippage to future year</b>	<b>Variation analysis: Spend in advance</b>	<b>Note ref</b>
Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers' Homes	1,547	1,547	-	74	479	(479)	-	-	<b>xvii</b>
Schools Delegated Capital	30,326	30,326	1,150	(58)	1,150	-	-	-	
Conquest Centre redevelopment	341	341	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Youth Investment Fund	193	193	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Children's Services Essential System Developments	1,279	1,279	1,279	146	1,279	-	-	-	
<b>Total CSD</b>	<b>33,686</b>	<b>33,686</b>	<b>2,429</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>2,908</b>	<b>(479)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>xviii</b>