

REPORT OF THE CABINET

The Cabinet met on 24 September, 21 October and 11 November 2025.

Attendees: -

Councillor Glazier OBE (Chair) (3)
Councillors Bennett (Vice-Chair) (3), Bowdler (3), di Cara (3), Claire Dowling (2) Maynard (3), and Standley (3)

1. Council Monitoring Q1 2025/26

1.1 The Cabinet considered a report on the Council's position and year-end projections for the Council Plan targets, Revenue Budget, Capital Programme, and Savings Plan, together with Risks at the end of June 2025.

1.2 Broad progress against the Council's four strategic priority outcomes is summarised from paragraph 1.14 and an overview of finance and performance data is provided in the Corporate Summary at Appendix 1. Strategic risks are reported at Appendix 8.

Update on the year end position for the Council Plan 2024/25

1.3. Outturns are now available for the 6 Council Plan measures for 2024/25, which were carried over from quarter 4. Measures are carried over when action has been completed but outturn data is not available for reporting at year-end. Outturns for these measures are provided in Appendix 3 (Adult Social Care and Health) and Appendix 4 (Business Services Department). Overall, 75% of targets (45 of the 60 Council Plan measures) for 2024/25 were met or exceeded.

1.4 The outturn of 31% for the unclassified roads measure has been replaced with a null outturn (represented as 'not available' in the Council Plan) for the 2024/25 year due to identified data quality issues. Further information is provided in Appendix 6.

Overview of Council Plan 2025/26 outturns and strategic risks

1.5 The Council Plan 2025/26 and the Portfolio Plans 2025/26 – 2027/28 have been updated with available 2024/25 outturns and final performance measure targets. All plans are published on the Council's website. The Corporate Summary (Appendix 1) contains a forecast of performance against targets.

1.6 The Strategic Risk Register, Appendix 8, was reviewed and updated to reflect the Council's risk profile. Risk 12 (Cyber Attack), Risk 15 (Climate), Risk 9 (Workforce) and Risk 6 (Local Economic Growth) have updated risk definitions and risk controls. Risk 22 (Oracle), Risk 4 (Health), Risk 5 (Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources), Risk 20 (Placements for Children and Young People in Our Care), Risk 1 (Roads), and Risk 18 (Data Breach) have updated risk controls.

Budget Outturn

1.7 The detailed revenue projections for each department are set out in the relevant appendices which show a projected overspend of £25.8m by 31 March 2026. All departments other than Governance Services are overspending, reflecting the difficult financial situation that the Council, along with many others, face.

1.8 The 2025/26 budget, set in February 2025, included a number of modelled assumptions, particularly in demand-led social care services, with regard to the number of people who would access our services plus the costs of the delivery of the services required to meet their assessed needs. Whilst additional budget was provided for growth in demand, demographic changes and inflationary pressures, departments are reporting below how in a number in service areas demand is now modelled to exceed the assumptions made in the latter part of 2024. Costs are also rising as the impact of increases in staffing costs and the complexity of need that needs to be supported continue to grow.

1.9 The main headlines are:

- Children's Services (CSD) is forecast to overspend by £16.7m; the main financial pressure continues to come from the statutory demand-driven areas of Looked After Children (LAC), Child Protection, and Home to School Transport.

LAC placements remain the largest financial pressure within Children's Services, with overspend forecast on agency residential and secure placements, due in part to the volume of high-need placements and increased cost of high-cost placements.

The LAC placement budget had £3.210m growth in 2025/26, which was calculated based on an assumed 1.23% increase in numbers. In reality, LAC numbers have only increased by 0.16% since 2024/25, but there is a higher number of placements for young people with complex needs costing over £10k per week, increasing from 15 in 2024/25 to 21 in Q1 2025/26. This is a national trend as recently highlighted in a report by the Local Government Association. The risk remains of children who are currently unknown to the service entering into high-cost care placements from hospital, youth justice settings, or adoption breakdowns throughout this year and it is hard to quantify a forecast for the unknowns.

Actions undertaken to mitigate the costs include: the Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) contributing to a significant reduction in child protection numbers and cost avoidance through enabling children at the edge of care to remain living safely within their families; the Foundations programme aimed at avoiding repeat care proceedings for parents/carers who have previously had children removed from their care; Family Group Conferencing and support for Kinship carers; embedding of the Valuing Care approach to achieve step-downs and reunifications; a new "Heading Home" strategy to support reunification planning and monitoring; and the establishment of a commissioning and placements service in 2024/25 to focus on improved market management and challenging provider costs; and work with the Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) to improve placement sufficiency and market management across the South East.

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 risk remains that any additional or extended high-cost placements could have a material impact on the forecast throughout this year.

The overspend in Home to School Transport can be mainly attributed to the number of clients with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). Spend on these clients is set to increase by 10% from 2024/25; linked both to Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers and unit costs increasing. Significant work has gone into implementing cost reduction measures within the service including a review of solo routes and optimisation of routes.

Not included in the figures reported above is the position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which, in accordance with the statutory accounting override set out in the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2020, allow local authorities to carry forward DSG deficits on their balance sheets. As of 31 March 2025, East Sussex has a cumulative DSG surplus of £2.8m, which is very unusual, as most local authorities have significant DSG deficits. However, it is projected that there will be a deficit of £19.1m by

the end of 2025/26, which will be taken directly to the balance sheet and presented in the statement of accounts as negative reserves.

This sudden transition to a DSG deficit is caused by pressures within the High Needs Block of DSG, which is used to fund education for children and young people with SEND or who attend Alternative Provision. There is an accelerating demand for special school placements which, as East Sussex's maintained schools are full, means that children are placed increasingly in Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMS) at inflated cost. There is limited control over the annual increases in costs at INMS as there is no legal framework in which to challenge the costs of provision. Additionally, there is an increase in the number of children for whom parents are requesting costly bespoke provision outside of school, such as private tutoring and agencies.

- The forecast overspend for Adult Social Care is £9.0m which largely relates to the Independent Sector, where the overspend is forecast to be £8.7m. This is due to an increase in demand and more people being supported, however it should be noted that support is being provided at a lower average cost than previous years, because the service is managing the market, being prudent with packages of support and reviewing more people. There is an overspend in Directly Provided Services of £0.316m due to staffing cost pressures, increasing costs and demand for equipment services to support people in their homes and legal fees.
- Communities, Economy and Transport is showing a forecast overspend of £0.1m. The largest overspend is in Highways where the cost of electricity for street lighting and depots is higher than budgeted, offset by underspends in other areas.
- There is a forecast overspend of £0.2m for Business Services Property Services due to increased procurement costs for the new Digital Hub and loss of income from a courier service contract.

1.10 Within Centrally Held Budgets (CHB), including Treasury Management (TM), and corporate funding there is a forecast underspend of £10.8m, which includes the general contingency:

- There is currently an estimated £0.9m underspend on TM, based on a reduced in-year capital borrowing requirement and greater than anticipated returns on investments. It should be noted that there has been a fall in cash investment balances; whilst above benchmark returns are being achieved, the level of balances has fallen by 36% in one year to £137.2m at the end of June 2025.
- Within CHB the forecast underspend of £9.9m is due to the General Contingency of £5.7m, using £3.3m from the provision for budgetary risks, and £1.5m available from not transferring this contribution to the Capital Programme, offset by £0.6m debt impairment.
- Corporate Funding budgets are underspending by £0.2m, due to the additional allocations of Social Care-related grant and New Homes Bonus.

1.11 The net impact of the above is an unplanned draw from reserves of £14.9m in 2025/26. This is in addition to the planned £11.4m draw to present a balanced position in setting the 2025/26 budget. Use of the Capital reserve has the potential to increase the requirement to borrow, leading into increased costs in the future; use of Collection Fund surplus and Insurance and Local Government Reorganisation Reserves will likely hinder the Council's management of future risk and transformation. The Council's strategic reserves are £16.5m at 1 April 2025 - for comparison, the latest published budget gap after likely funding scenarios for 2026/27 is £24.6m. Any reduction in reserves reduces the flexibility available in dealing with the challenge of addressing next year's projected deficit and setting a balanced budget, without having to seek further savings or exceptional financial support. To address the projected in-year overspend and reduce the required draw from reserves, the Council continues with several actions introduced last year, including:

- Additional controls on spending, including the requirement for purchase orders above £1,000 to be supported by a business case and approved by a reviewing board.
- An updated recruitment protocol, including CMT approval of non-core role recruitment.

1.12 The total savings identified to be delivered in 2025/26, including slippage from previous years, are £14.3m. Departments are reporting that £13.2m will be able to be delivered in 2025/26, with £1.0m slipping to future years, and £0.2m not being able to be achieved but being replaced by other permanent savings. The impact of the slippage has been reflected in the revenue monitoring position. The departmental appendices provide more detail.

1.13 The Capital Programme net expenditure for the year is projected to be £95.6m against a budget of £103.0m. A slippage risk factor has been applied to the capital programme to reflect likely slippage based on a risk assessment of historic levels of actual expenditure and slippage at a project/programme level. The risk factor will be held at a corporate level to enable services / project managers to manage project budgets at a local level, whilst ensuring greater robustness to the planning and monitoring process at a corporate level. The net forecast expenditure after applying this risk factor is £84.8m.

- The programme is forecasting total slippage of £8.1m which is further to reprofiling undertaken as part of the State of the County review. The quarter 1 slippage relates wholly to the Bus Service Improvement Plan (£8.1m) from a mixture of the 2025/26 (new) programme and previous years' programme.
- The programme is projecting an overspend of £0.7m, relating to: House Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers Homes (0.5m) historic commitments and the Bexhill and Hastings Link Road (£0.2m).

Progress against Council Priorities

Driving sustainable economic growth

1.14 The Council has spent £398m with 992 local suppliers over the past 12 months. This equates to 61% of our total procurement spend, which is above our target of 60%. The Procurement team continues to promote our contract opportunities to local suppliers, as well as building local supply chain opportunities into our tenders where possible. 17 contracts, with a value of £3.83m, were agreed in quarter 1 and as part of these we secured £1.24m in social value commitments. This equates to 32% of the contract value, and will include apprenticeships, the creation of local jobs and careers awareness programmes amongst other initiatives (Appendix 4).

1.15 Work on our highways has continued, with 7,080 potholes repaired in quarter 1, 4,903 of these being carriageway potholes and the remainder primarily footway potholes. We completed 42 road improvement schemes in quarter 1 to improve the condition of the roads (Appendix 6).

1.16 The Skills East Sussex Engineering Task Group delivered engineering clubs at schools in Hastings in quarter 1, to help meet the Skills East Sussex priorities. We also procured partners during quarter 1 to deliver eight Skills Bootcamp courses during 2025/26. Delivery of the Bootcamps is due to start in quarter 2 (Appendix 6).

1.17 67 businesses in East Sussex were supported through business support programmes during quarter 1. 47 of these were supported through the Growth Hub, 17 through Newhaven Business Grants and 3 through Rural Business Grants (Appendix 6).

1.18 Skills East Sussex celebrated a decade of working to improve local employment and skills levels and boost economic prosperity in East Sussex in quarter 1. Achievements over the last 10 years have included securing over £60m of additional funding for the delivery of employment and skills initiatives and capital infrastructure; launching one of the UK's first

Growth Hubs and developing adult learning and employment programmes such as Moving on Up, Support into Work and Multiply (Appendix 6).

Keeping vulnerable people safe

1.19 The number of children with a Child Protection Plan has reduced to 579 at the end of quarter 1, down from 614 in quarter 4 2024/25. This has been achieved through effective multi-disciplinary work with children and families, reducing risk and effecting change with families. The rate of Looked After Children decreased slightly in quarter 1 to 67.1 per 10,000 (695 children) down from 67.3 per 100,000 at quarter 4 2024/25, which is below the national average rate for England, at 73.9 in Q4 2024/25, and IDACI (expected rates based on levels of deprivation) at 70.0, Q4 2023/24, but higher than the rate for our statistical neighbours (62.8, quarter 4 2024/25) (Appendix 5).

1.20 The 2024/25 outturn (reported a quarter in arrears) for the percentage of people affected by rape, sexual violence and abuse who have improved coping strategies was 86.6% against a target of 88%. The provider has attributed the lower performance to staff changes across the organisation and data accuracy. Guidance on inputting information has now been created to resolve the issue. (Appendix 3).

1.21 A new contract to provide safe accommodation for people seeking safety from domestic abuse in East Sussex began on 1 July 2025. The new provider, Interventions Alliance, has taken over the 37 existing units of accommodation in the county. Plans to provide an additional 18 units within the first 6 months of the contract are underway (Appendix 3).

1.22 Trading Standards made 45 interventions during quarter 1 to protect vulnerable people. These interventions included installing call blockers and CCTV for vulnerable people who had been repeatedly targeted by scammers. 63 businesses received training or advice from Trading Standards during quarter 1 (Appendix 6).

Helping people help themselves

1.23 The Council's Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) have continued to deliver support and interventions with parents and carers of children on Children in Need or Child Protection Plans. They work with parents across the county providing dedicated support to address their personal issues, in order to support families to stay together and improve the wellbeing and life chances of children. In quarter 1, interventions with 78% of families we worked with were successfully concluded. This supported parents and carers to achieve stability in relation to their mental health, drug and alcohol use, safety from abuse or causing others harm (Appendix 5).

1.24 The Early Years Funding team works closely with parent and carers, early years providers and other agencies to ensure the take up of the Department for Education's (DfE) free early education entitlement for three- and four-year-olds. Four schools in East Sussex were successful in bidding to the DfE and will all receive capital funding of up to £150K to establish school-based nurseries. These new nurseries will help increase the number of places available for families to access funded early education and childcare places (Appendix 5).

1.25 The 2024/25 outturn (reported a quarter in arrears) for the number of IMD1 NHS Health Checks conducted, shows that there was a decrease of 16% in 2024/25, compared to 2023/24, against a target of a 9% increase. The overall NHS Health Check activity by Hastings and Rother Healthcare reduced by 43% between 2023/24 and 2024/25. Furthermore, unlike in previous years, overall health check activity across East Sussex did not increase in quarter 4 as expected. This may be linked to significant changes in how the programme is to be delivered from 2025/26, alongside wider operational pressures (Appendix 3).

1.26 4.32% of the local smoking population set a quit date in 2024/25 (reported a quarter in arrears), against a target of 7%. However, individuals who do set a quit date achieve good outcomes with the stop smoking service, with 59% achieving a four-week quit against a target of 50%. As smoking declines nationally the service is engaging with the more entrenched smoking community, which may be impacting on the number who want to quit. Public Health have begun a number of programmes to help encourage people to access stop smoking support (Appendix 3).

Making best use of resources now and for the future

1.27 During quarter 1, the Leader and Chief Executive continued to raise issues and priorities for the county with our local MPs, including through a specific update on our State of the County report. This set out the uncertain and stark financial position the Council faces and asked for MPs' support in lobbying Government to recognise the specific and unique needs of East Sussex, which are more acute than much of the rest of the South East, and that these must be appropriately reflected in new funding arrangements (Appendix 7).

1.28 We completed 5 energy efficiency schemes during quarter 1, including 2 solar PV schemes, 2 insulation schemes and 1 estate rationalisation. The total Council carbon emissions outturn for 2024/25 (reported a quarter in arrears) saw a 36% reduction against a target of 50%. Carbon emissions from the Council's electricity consumption fell by 3% during 2024/25. As the grid carbon emissions factor remained the same in 2024/25 as in 2023/24, the 3% emissions reduction is principally down to the Council reducing its electricity use. In 2024/25, external temperatures for East Sussex were lower than in 2023/24. This colder weather increased heating demand and prevented the Council from seeing a reduction in emissions from fossil fuel heat, which have remained at the same level year on year (Appendix 4).

1.29 The Council has continued to work with a range of partners to develop and deliver carbon reduction and climate change adaptation work in quarter 1. This included finalising a climate change adaptation toolkit, which will be rolled out to 3 Council services during 2025/26. We also continued discussions with GB Energy about options for securing third party funding for rooftop solar panels on schools (Appendix 6).

1.30 The quarter 1 sickness absence figure for the whole authority (excluding schools) is 2.08 days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) role, a 3.8% decrease compared to quarter 1 2024/25. The year end estimate for 2025/26 (based on the quarter 1 data) is 8.86 days/FTE, so the target of 9.10 days/FTE is predicted to be met (Appendix 4).

1.31 The Council has continued work to ensure its office hubs are used efficiently, and during quarter 1, 2 properties were marketed for sale, Sandbanks in Hailsham and the former Rangers' Workshop in Rye. A public consultation has also begun on the disposal of the Tilling Green Playing Fields in Rye. In addition, marketing of vacant space in South and East Blocks at County Hall has commenced (Appendix 4).

1.32 The Government's consultation on the proposed establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Sussex closed early in quarter 1. The consultation followed our successful application, along with West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, to join the national devolution priority programme, working on an accelerated timescale towards a mayoral election in May 2026. Subject to further national and local decisions, work will continue to prepare for the creation of the combined authority, including the legislation required. As part of the Government's separate plans for the reorganisation of local government, the Council has continued to work with district and borough council partners to develop a final reorganisation proposal for a single unitary council for East Sussex, which was submitted to Government in September 2025 (Appendix 7).

1.33 The Council's East Sussex Wellbeing and Employment Service won the 'excellent support' category at the National Homeless Link awards during quarter 1. The award recognises the holistic approach to bringing together housing, health, wellbeing and support

into skills and employment for people who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation and for people who are at risk of being homeless (Appendix 3).

2. Ashdown Forest Trust Fund

2.1 The Ashdown Forest Trust, a registered charity, was set out by declaration of Trust in 1988. East Sussex County Council is the trustee and agrees grants made to the Ashdown Forest Conservators, from the Ashdown Forest Trust Fund.

2023/24 Accounts

2.2 Subsequent to the 2023/24 accounts being approved, the Independent Examination process has now been completed in accordance with Section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. The Examiner's report is attached as Appendix 9. It does not identify any issues that require any further action by the Council as the trustees.

2024/25 Accounts

2.3 The Trust's Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet are set out in the attached Appendix 10. The Income and Expenditure Account shows a surplus in 2024/25 of £9,062, as a result of no legal cost being incurred during the year.

2.4 The main source of income to the Trust relates to the rent from the Royal Ashdown Golf Club at £70,000 per annum. The only other income this year was from bank interest. The expenditure mostly relates to the £65,100 grant paid to the Ashdown Forest Conservators. The remaining expenditure was for audit fees.

2.5 The accumulative General Reserve totalled £188,346 at 31 March 2025.

2.6 A formal annual report and statement of accounts will be compiled in accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) by the end of January 2026, once the Independent Examiner report has been received.

General Reserve

2.7 The General Reserve current balance is £188,346.

2.8 With the Ashdown Forest Trust Deeds it states in:

- Clause 3(2), the Trust are "promoting the conservation of Ashdown Forest as a quiet and natural area of outstanding beauty and as an amenity and place of last resort for members of the public".
- Clause 7(1)(c), gives the Council power as trustee to permit the Conservators "to apply any profits rents or other income of Ashdown (whether collected by the Conservators or paid to the trustee by the Conservators) in furtherance of the object set out in clause 3 above and so that the trustee may authorise the Conservators to determine the manner in which such profits rents or other income are to be applied in furtherance of the said object..."

2.9 Information provided at Appendix 11, highlights a £113,700 programme of tree surveys and works required across the forest.

2.10 The Conservators carried out the work defined as very urgent and urgent, leaving £107,200 outstanding, of which a further £8,000 will be covered by the Conservator's budget.

2.11 The Conservators requested to draw the remaining £99,200 from the General Reserve.

2.12 The Trust made an operating surplus of £9,062 during 2024/25. The General Reserve as at 31 March 2025 amounted to £188,346. This fund is available to finance expenditure which meets the Trust's objectives.

2.13 Cabinet approved the Conservators' request to £99,200 from the General Reserve to fund works required across the forest.

3. Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assessment of Adult Social Care

3.1 The Health and Care Act 2022 granted the Care Quality Commission (CQC) new powers to assess local authorities' compliance with the Care Act 2014. The 'return of the regulator' was a significant development for adult social care departments who had not been assessed by statutory, external bodies for approximately 15 years.

3.2 The CQC developed a new assessment framework for adult social care assessments as these differed significantly from their existing assessment regimes. This first round of assessments has been a learning process for all parties and the CQC adjusted their methodology throughout this first round of assessments and have indicated that they will undertake future assessments differently. Details of any new approach have not yet been shared.

3.3 The CQC were clear that, whilst they understand the pressures faced by adult social care departments and their partners nationally, they would not take this into account when assessing our delivery of the Care Act.

3.4 In East Sussex, a significant amount of preparatory work was undertaken in advance of the CQC assessment. This included an extensive self-evaluation process using the industry standard Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Social Services (ADASS) self-assessment tool. We produced a Self-assessment document, which was promoted by the LGA as good practice. We commissioned an LGA Peer Review in February 2024 as a way of providing further assurance and insights into our key strengths and areas for development. Our preparation for assessment was reviewed by the People Scrutiny Committee CQC Reference Group.

3.5 East Sussex was notified of the official start of our CQC assessment on 12 August 2024. Stage one of the assessment was to supply the CQC with around 250 pieces of evidence including performance data, policies, strategic plans and our Self-assessment. Following the submission of this evidence, we focussed on preparation sessions for Members and staff who would meet with the CQC and in providing summary case file information to support the CQC in conversations with adults and carers who had used our services.

3.6 East Sussex was notified on 2 December 2024 that the on-site element of the assessment would take place between the 11 and 13 of February 2025. We ran mock interview sessions and additional preparation sessions in the lead into the site visit.

3.7 The second phase of the CQC assessment included:

- Interviews with adults and carers who had used ASCH services.
- Interviews with Members including the Leader of the Council, the Lead and opposition Lead Members for ASCH and cross-party representatives from the People Scrutiny Committee, including the Chair.
- Interviews with ASCH officers including the Chief Executive, Director of ASCH, Director of Public Health and staff from across the department.
- Drop in sessions for ASCH staff
- Questionnaires and interviews with key external stakeholders and partners including the NHS, the voluntary community and social enterprise sectors and the independent chair of the Safeguarding Board.
- Preparing a three hour pre-assessment on-line presentation for the CQC which highlighted our key strengths and areas for development.

3.8 The CQC published its assessment of East Sussex Adult Social Care and Health's delivery of the Care Act on 3 October 2025. The full report can be found at Appendix 12. Key findings from the assessment are summarised below. Proposed next steps are set out further in the report.

Overall rating

3.9 Adult Social Care and Health achieved a rating of 'Good'. This means that the CQC consider the service to be performing well and meeting their expectations.

Areas of strength and areas for improvement

3.10 The CQC framework is set out using four overarching themes. Each of these themes are outlined below with the key strengths and areas for development identified by the CQC.

Theme 1: Working with people - Strengths

3.11 Adult Social Care and Health is easily accessible

The report identified that Adult Social Care and Health is easily accessible through Health and Social Care Connect (HSCC) and information and advice was available as well as onward referrals to relevant support and services.

3.12 Person centred care planning

The approach to assessment and care planning was person-centred and strength based. The CQC stated *'The approach reflected people's right to choice, built on their strengths and assets and reflected what they wanted to achieve and how they wished to live their lives. People told us they felt listened to throughout their Care Act assessment and that their views were heard and respected.'*

3.13 Development of an integrated offer through Integrated Care Teams (ICTs)

There was recognition of the work being undertaken with partners such as, primary and community health services, borough and district councils, mental health, the NHS Sussex ICB and Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to develop an integrated offer of health, care and wellbeing throughout the ICTs.

3.14. Prevention offer that includes the use of technology and OT clinics

The report acknowledges the preventive offer including Occupational Health clinics that people could attend and telecare which is technology that enables people to remain independent and safe in their own homes. The CQC reported that *'The local authority works*

with people, partners and the local community to make available a range of services, facilities, resources and other measures to promote independence, and to prevent, delay or reduce the need for care and support.'

3.15 The report recognised the significant impact of the Joint Community Reablement and Rehabilitation (JCR) service in preventing on-going care needs, by stating *'In 2023/24 72% of adults did not require on-going care after receiving JCR support.'*

3.16 Effective delivery of Direct Payments

The report outlined that Direct Payments were well managed, and staff were supported to ensure they are offered to all adults and contained the following, *'People told us they received direct payments from the local authority. The direct payment process was easy to understand, and payments were received on time and as planned.'*

3.17 Effectively reducing inequalities

The report outlines that there is a good understanding of local demographics and this information is used to reduce inequalities in people's care and support experiences and outcomes. There is an Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy and action plan in place. It acknowledged the Accessible Information Standard policy and how staff would consider people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss, and ensured they were able to get information in a format they understood.

Theme 1: Working with people - Areas for development

3.18 Waiting lists for Care Act assessments and reviews

The report outlines that Adult Care Act assessments and reviews, Carers, Occupational Therapy and Financial Assessments were not always completed in a timely manner. The CQC noted that there were waiting lists in place.

3.19 The CQC however, recognised the work that has been undertaken on waiting times and the implementation of an enhanced, standard process for managing waiting lists which includes: better communication with people, better management of waiting lists by monitoring risk and the management of performance.

3.20 Inconsistent information about Financial Assessments

The CQC found that information around Financial Assessments was not consistently made clear to people but noted the project to improve waiting times and communication regarding financial assessments including working with the Citizen Panel and People Bank to design and test new versions of written communications.

3.21 Limited information on the effectiveness of signposting

Although the report recognised information and advice was provided by HSCC to East Sussex residents; it identified that there was not a systemic approach to monitor whether signposting had been effective for people.

Theme 2: Providing Support - Strengths

3.22 Effective JSNA and Market Position Statement

The report notes that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Market Position Statement are used well to identify and plan for local care and support services. The CQC refer to clear plans to improve local people's health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities in East Sussex.

3.23 Good oversight of commissioned services

The report indicated commissioning teams had good oversight of commissioned services and provided on-going management, overview of quality and service delivery, and held providers to account for the contract and contained the following: *'Partners told us the local authority's model of commissioning was accessible and supportive of all providers.'*

3.24 Effective Market Support to monitor provider quality.

The Market Support Team maintained knowledge of the provider markets and risk utilising risk assessment tools to provide effective market support including in business continuity situations.

3.25 Strong co-production with people who are experts by experience

The report outlined the many good examples of co-production including work completed by the Involvement Matters Team who are made up of people with Learning Disabilities and are directly involved in service development and staff training, for example *'People told us they had a lot of interaction with the local authority and had been involved with a co-production group who supported with staff training, interviews and produced easy read documents.'*

3.26 Effective partnership working

The report highlighted that partners participated in developing local authority strategies through their involvement in the ASC Strategy Steering Group, Community Oversight Board, Health and Care Partnership Board and the Financial Inclusion Group and indicated that *'Partners told us the local authority valued them, and they had strong links with adult social care and public health'*

3.27 The report referenced our Commissioning Excellence Programme as a good example of developing excellence in local authority / VCFSE commissioning.

Theme 2: Providing Support – Areas for development

3.28 Gap in provision for people with complex and challenging conditions

The report reflected that there is a gap in provision in the county for people with particularly complex and challenging conditions. It is acknowledged that this is not a sole responsibility of ASCH and is being addressed with partners across the system by planning a strategic approach to respond to this challenge.

Theme 3: How the Local Authority ensures safety within the system – Strengths

3.29 Effective case risk management policy with triage by risk level

The CQC noted that there is an effective case risk management policy which is used by all operational staff where referrals are triaged by level of risk. This was supported by practice standards, case monitoring documentation and training.

3.30 Good quality assurance oversight of the independent care sector

The report describes our Market Oversight Panel (MOP) which is a multi-agency two-weekly forum. The forum shares information about the care sector to identify potential risks to people and risks and impacts on the wider market and providers and was identified as a good source of coordinated support to the market.

3.31 Effective transitions charter and pathway for young people to adult services

The CQC concluded that there are suitable processes in place to support young people and their families with the transition to adult social care services. There is a Transitions Charter in place which informs young people and families what they can expect from the process.

3.32 Effective safeguarding

The CQC notes that safeguarding concerns are responded to appropriately, in a timely manner and that there are effective processes for quality assurance oversight of safeguarding. The report refers to the close links with the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) and how learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) was included in relevant staff training.

Theme 3: How the Local Authority ensures safety within the system – Areas for development

3.33 Delays in hospital discharge

The report noted that hospital discharge was not always completed in a timely manner for people mainly due to Discharge to Assess (D2A) capacity. The report acknowledged that the number of D2A beds had reduced due to reductions in NHS funding and capacity was being discussed with system partners.

3.34 Inconsistent sharing of safeguarding enquiry outcomes with providers

The CQC noted that some partners felt that they could be kept better informed about the outcome of safeguarding concerns that they had raised.

3.35 Sharing Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) themes with partners.

Although SAR themes are shared with partners the report suggests this could be done more systematically, but notes that this is a planned action moving forward.

Theme 4: Leadership – Strengths

3.36 Clear governance and accountability structures at all levels

The report outlines the effective use of adult case file audits and our Quality Practice and Assurance Framework (QPAF) to provide information and assurance on the quality of practice in ASCH.

3.37 Effective leadership

The report notes that there is a stable adult social care leadership team with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and indicates that *‘Leaders were visible, capable and compassionate’ and ‘The local authority’s political and executive leaders were well informed, and the scrutiny process was effective.’*

3.38 Effective risk management framework and escalation processes

The CQC note that there are effective risk management and escalation arrangements in place.

3.39 Strategic planning informed by performance, risk, and EDI data

The CQC report states, *‘The local authority uses information about risks, performance, inequalities and outcomes to inform it’s adult social care strategy and plans.’*

3.40 A culture of learning and development

The CQC report states, *‘There was an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning, improvement and development.’*

3.41 Strong training and development offer for staff

The report highlights the bespoke training that is aligned with Care Act duties and professional needs, the strong emphasis on reflective practice, peer learning, and legal literacy and

emotional resilience support for staff handling crisis calls, and states *‘Staff told us about the numerous opportunities for career progression and staff development.’*

3.42 The report notes that a strengths-based practice (SBP) model is promoted with a strong emphasis on wellbeing, choice and self-direction.

3.43 Learning from complaints drives service improvement

The CQC note *‘The local authority learned from people’s feedback about their experiences of care and support, and feedback from staff and partners. This informed strategies, improvement activity and decision making at all levels.’*

Theme 4: Leadership – Areas for development

3.44 Prevention strategy still in development

At the time of the assessment in February 2024, the Prevention Strategy, *‘which has a clear focus on prevention and wellbeing to reduce care and support needs’*, was still in development. The CQC noted this was yet to be implemented.

Next steps – response to the key findings

3.45 The key findings from the CQC assessment will be used to review and update our existing development and improvement plans, aligning these with our overarching vision and agreed priorities.

3.46 As many of the development areas highlighted by the CQC were self identified, there is a close alignment with our current Portfolio Plan priorities of Prevention, Waiting Times, Safeguarding, Quality and Value for Money.

3.47 Improvement actions will be delivered through our existing strategies (eg: Waiting Lists Project, Safeguarding Hub in HSCC, etc.) and wider health and care system initiatives (eg: Complex commissioning and market development, delayed discharge reduction) and monitored on a quarterly basis as part of the regular Council Plan progress reporting.

3.48 The strengths outlined in the report show that, overall, East Sussex is in a good position and is delivering well against the challenges and pressures faced by adult social care and our key partners, both locally and nationally.

3.49 As was the case with the LGA Peer Review, our strengths and areas for development were known to us and had been documented in our Self-assessment and / or highlighted in our pre-assessment presentation to the CQC, and most importantly, largely already included within our existing plans and priorities.

3.50 The People Scrutiny Committee, through its CQC Reference Group, assisted in preparations for the assurance process and, as such, are well placed to monitor the development and implementation of our response to the CQC report as part of our wider improvement plan.

4. Ofsted Focused Visit – July 2025

4.1 Ofsted undertook a Focused Inspection of the East Sussex Children’s Services between the 23 and 31 July 2025 (on-site 30 to 31 July). The purpose of this type of inspection is to evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children. For this inspection visit, the theme was:

Children in need or subject to a protection plan, covering:

- Thresholds
- step-up/step-down between children in need and child protection
- children on the edge of care
- children subject to a letter before proceedings and the quality and impact of pre-proceedings interventions, such as family group decision-making meetings
- children in need at risk of family breakdown
- the quality of decisions about entering care
- protection of disabled children

4.2 This visit forms part of the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Our last ILACS was December 2023, where we achieved the overall rating of 'good'.

4.3 Focused visits usually occur between standard and short inspections. ESCC had not had a focused visit within this framework, neither following the ILACS in 2018 nor the ILACS in 2023.

4.4 The report, published on 1 September 2025 is attached at Appendix 13. It can also be viewed using the following link: [East Sussex County Council - Inspection Reports - Ofsted](#).

4.5 This type of visit does not provide an outcome grading but instead sets out key findings within the area of focus or theme, and any associated recommendations.

4.6 The response letter highlights the following key findings:

Children in need in East Sussex, and those who are the subject of a child protection plan, are receiving services that make a positive difference for them and whose effectiveness is being continually developed.

The senior leadership team, with strong corporate support, continues to invest in services for vulnerable children. Leaders have continuously developed and refined services to ensure they have a positive impact on children's lives.

There is a strong focus on providing integrated, multidisciplinary support to children and families. This approach ensures that children and families benefit from consistent, high-quality practice that supports their progress and improves their lives.

There is relentless focus on supporting a stable and committed workforce, enabling staff to develop their skills and feel valued within the council. Leaders are actively creating the right conditions to strengthen social work practice and improve the quality of services for children and families.

4.7 We have received one recommendation for improvement:

The timeliness with which child protection strategy meetings are held, as this is not consistently timely for all children (outcome 3, national framework).

4.8 The findings recognise, however, that this was associated to a small number of children, and where when risks are urgent, the holding of strategy meetings is consistently prioritised. The response letter also noted:

Once held, child protection strategy meetings are attended by the relevant professionals, who appropriately consider the level of risk and the impact on the children involved. There is timely progression to child protection conferences when required.

4.9 East Sussex has maintained a focus on the key priority outcome of keeping vulnerable people safe. The response letter recognises the improvements made following the last ILACS in 2023, in relation to the Public Law Outline, private fostering arrangements and neglect.

4.10 Ofsted also recognised the work to support many children to remain at home, through our connected families approach:

Children on the edge of care but not receiving support through the pre-proceedings process can also benefit from exemplary and transformational support from an integrated multidisciplinary team of social workers, connected coaches and therapists. As a result, many children are supported to remain living at home with their families.

4.11 The visit and the subsequent response letter were resoundingly positive, including the encouraging recognition of leadership and of ESCC as a reflective and improvement driven local authority:

Leaders have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development. The local authority's self-evaluation is reflective and demonstrates a commitment to learning, developing social work practice, and responding to areas where development is needed. This understanding has been used by the Director of Children's Services and her wider leadership team to drive ongoing improvement in the quality and impact of services for children.

KEITH GLAZIER, OBE
(Chair)