

Governance Services – Q2 2025/26

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

Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)

The Council is currently facing the most difficult financial outlook in its history. Despite our efficient and effective services and partnerships, there remains a fundamental mismatch between the needs of our residents, the cost of delivering services and the funding we currently expect to have. The projected deficit for 2025/26 will require a further draw on our already depleted reserves making it more difficult to set a balanced budget in February without additional funding to meet the needs of the population of East Sussex. We have begun work to identify further savings in 2026/27 as part of efforts to bridge the funding gap. Additional savings will have further significant impacts on local people, staff and partners and may increase the need for and cost of services in future years. With very limited options remaining we are faced with hard, short-term choices which do not reflect how we would want to approach evidence-based, longer term planning. In anticipation of a potential need to seek Exceptional Financial Support from Government, we invited CIPFA to undertake a financial governance and assurance review during Q2 to provide an independent check on the actions the Council is taking in response to the financial outlook. Cabinet considered CIPFA's report as part of RPPR planning in November and agreed with the implementation of an action plan developed to address the report's recommendations.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Alongside our partners in West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, we continued work in Q2 on the proposed establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Sussex as part of the national devolution priority programme. We continue to work towards securing the opportunities from devolution.

Along with our district and borough council partners, we submitted our One East Sussex proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in East Sussex in Q2. One East Sussex shows that a single unitary council would be simpler for residents, would save money, and would avoid the extra complexity of splitting up existing services. Pending Government decisions, a public consultation on One East Sussex will follow with a decision from Government expected in March 2026.

Corporate Lobbying

Throughout Q2 the Leader and Chief Executive continued to raise issues and priorities for the county with our local MPs, including highlighting the stark financial position the Council faces in individual meetings with MPs and ministers. During Q2, the Government consulted on its proposed approach to local authority funding reform through the Fair Funding Review 2.0. The Council provided a robust response which in particular emphasised the need for updated relative needs formulae to better take account of the county's older population, the need for a more sophisticated approach to calculating local labour costs, and the negative impact on the Council of a proposed 100% Council Tax equalisation. We also wrote to our local MPs to request their support for the Council's position and received support in raising the Council's concerns with ministers directly. Further lobbying work included the Council taking the opportunity to provide a briefing to local MPs in advance of a parliamentary debate on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities provision in the South East, on the key issues for East Sussex.

We continue to draw on broader partnerships and networks at the local, regional and national level to lobby on current priorities, including through the Local Government Association, County Councils Network and South East 7. Chief Officers also continue to influence service specific national policy developments through national professional associations and networks and responses to specific Government consultations within their service areas.

Supporting democracy

During Q2 we supported 33 meetings including: 2 County Council meetings; 2 Cabinet meetings; 6 Lead Member meetings; 8 Scrutiny Committees and Review Boards and 15 other committees and panels. We also despatched agendas for a further 6 meetings and supported 1 Whole Council Forum. The webcasts of meetings were viewed 2,296 times in Q2. The most viewed meeting was the Full Council meeting on 8 July 2025, which received 210 views, either live or as a recording.

In Q2, the Member Training and Development programme continued to deliver a range of courses and briefings in support of Members and the roles they hold. Courses delivered included sessions on East Sussex Housing Partnership Strategy, Road Safety, Archaeology, Funding Reform, Adult Social Care Prevention Strategy: Wellbeing approach, Overview of Education, Food Waste, and NHS 10 Year Plan. Most training sessions continue to be delivered remotely with resources, such as slides and a recording from training sessions, being saved to the Councillors' area of the intranet for future reference.

We supported 12 Scrutiny Committee and Reference Group meetings during Q2. The Council's scrutiny committees have continued to make use of varied approaches to ensure timely scrutiny input on a range of issues. A joint Place and People Scrutiny Committee reference group on devolution and LGR met twice to consider and comment on the latest position with both programmes. Scrutiny comments on the LGR proposal for East Sussex were considered by Cabinet as part of its decision making in September. The Place Scrutiny Committee met twice in Q2 and scrutinised issues including the end of year 2 performance of the highways maintenance contract. The Committee also received a briefing on the request assessment process, a supporting document to the Local Transport Plan 4, the development of which the Committee contributed to during 2023/24. The People Scrutiny Committee met twice in Q2 and considered reports on Healthy Ageing, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the annual report of the Safeguarding Adults Board and the annual review of Safer Communities. The Committee also received a briefing on the East Sussex Housing Partnership ahead of considering a report on the Housing Partnership Strategy at its July meeting. Both People and Place Committees also considered the State of the County and 2024/25 year end monitoring reports in July as part of ongoing scrutiny engagement in the RPPR process. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee met in Q2 where it considered and commented on reports on improving access to primary care services and children's mental health services in the county.

The Health and Wellbeing Board met twice in Q2 and considered reports on the Better Care Fund, work conducted by Healthwatch, NHS reforms, the annual Director of Public Health report, the Autism Action Plan and the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment. Health and Wellbeing Board members also attended a strategy session on reducing health inequalities as part of the Board's series of 'deep dives' on specific issues which are held 2-3 weeks before each formal meeting to inform the future Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Q2 also saw significant work undertaken by the East Sussex School Appeals Service. 60 appeals were received during Q2 with a further 37 appeals, which had been received in Q1, also being worked on. In total 54 appeals were heard, of which 9 were successful and 45 were dismissed by an Independent Appeal Panel. This resulted in appeals being heard across 10 days. Of the remaining 43 appeals, 17 are due to be heard during Q3 and 26 were either withdrawn by the families or were not needed because a place became available at a preferred school before the hearing. 2 school exclusion review requests were also received during Q2. Of these, 1 review request was heard by an Independent Review Panel in Q2 and 1 will be heard in Q3.

Legal Services

During Q2, Legal Services assisted Trading Standards in the successful prosecution of a rogue trader who had significantly overcharged elderly homeowners for below standard work. Sentencing is due to take place in Q3. Confiscation proceedings will be commenced to recover monies owed to the victims. In Q2 the Service also assisted Income Recovery in securing the recovery and repayment of debts totalling £292,206 compared to £12,621 in Q2 2024/25.

During Q2 the Service advised in relation to 67 Court of Protection cases compared to 58 in Q2 2024/25 and 86 Community Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards applications compared to 71 in Q2 2024/25. The Service also advised on matters relating to safeguarding vulnerable adults and continuing health care, and inquest hearings. In addition, the Service gave legal advice on 51 adult social care matters compared to 46 in Q2 2024/25.

The Service continues to work closely with Children's Services, providing advice and representation, including in pre-proceedings and court applications for care proceedings. Our priority is to keep children within their family when it is safe to do so, and for public law applications to be a necessary and proportionate response to achieve the best outcome for the child. At the end of Q2 2025/26, there were 36 ongoing pre-proceedings, this is 6 more than at the end of Q2 2024/25. At the end of Q2 2025/26, there were a total of 48 ongoing care proceedings for 82 children compared to 66 for 122 children at the end of Q2 2024/25. In Q2 2025/26 concluded proceedings took on average 43 weeks to conclude per child compared to an average of 47 weeks in Q2 2024/25.

During Q2, the Service completed agreements to secure financial contributions to the Council of over £1m, together with the delivery of additions and improvements to the highway network across the county. The Service also advised on 50 new property matters compared to 57 in Q2 2024/25. In addition, the Service has completed two academy conversions in Q2. The Service also completed a complex surrender of part of a long lease, which will facilitate the release of significant central government funding for schools. During Q2 2025/26, the Service also advised on 54 new contract and procurement matters compared to 62 in Q2 2024/25.

Coroner Services

The Council provides staff and accommodation to the East Sussex Coroner in undertaking the judicial role of investigating violent, un-natural or sudden deaths of unknown cause and deaths in custody. Accommodation includes the provision of mortuary, pathology, histology, toxicology and body removal services, as well as court and office accommodation and relevant hardware, software and information technology support. In Q2, current assistant coroner, Laura Bradford, was appointed by the consent of the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor as the new Senior Coroner. With the new Coroner's Office and courtrooms all under one roof at Westfield House at County Hall, the new Senior Coroner will have the opportunity to build on a service which provides key information and support to families, often at a time of significant vulnerability.

As an independent judicial officer holding office under the Crown, the Coroner operates entirely independently to the Council in making decisions about post mortems and inquests.

During Q2 2025/26, 336 deaths were reported to the Coroner compared with 524 in Q2 2024/25. Of those deaths, 59% (197) went on to have a post mortem compared to 47% (244) in Q2 2024/25. 95 Inquests were opened during Q2 compared to 105 inquests that were opened during Q2 2024/25. 72 Inquests were closed in Q2 2024/25 compared to 89 closed in Q2 2024/25. In Q2 2025/26, 1 inquest with a jury was held compared to none being held in Q2 2024/25. In Q2, 4 Inquests in writing were held, which do not require court bookings, compared to 20 in Q2 2024/25. There are currently 268 open inquests compared to 269 at the end of Q2 2024/25. At the end of Q2 64 Inquests were over 12 months old compared to 47 at the end of Q2 2024/25.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)

There were no Authorisations under RIPA during Q2.

Local Government Ombudsman complaints

The Ombudsman issued 15 decisions in Q2. 4 of these cases related to Adult Social Care (ASC) and 11 related to Children's Services (CS). 9 cases were closed before a full investigation for a variety of reasons. This included insufficient evidence of fault, complaints being out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, because the complaint had not been through our internal complaint process or because the Ombudsman had sufficient information to uphold the complaint.

All 6 cases that were fully investigated related to CS and were closed with the complaint partly or fully upheld as follows:

CS - The parent complained about the Council's handling of issues she had accessing her son's education, school transport, and how we communicated with her. The Ombudsman found the Council at fault for failing to ensure her son received an education and that there was school transport he could access during a six-month period and found some fault in how it communicated with the parent. The Council has agreed to apologise to the parent and pay £3,300 to acknowledge the distress and uncertainty she and her son experienced as a result of the Council's faults and to acknowledge the loss of education her son experienced from May to December 2024.

CS - The parent complained that the Council failed to secure the special educational provision set out in her daughter's Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). She said that her daughter did not receive Cognitive behavioural therapy-informed emotional support or social skills provision during 2023 and 2024, despite this being clearly specified in Section F of the EHCP. The Ombudsman found the Council at fault for failing to deliver the emotional support provision specified in the EHCP for a prolonged period. The Council has agreed to reimburse the parent £750 for the cost of privately arranged autism support sessions delivered between November 2023 and May 2024. It has also agreed to pay the parent £1,500 in recognition of the missed provision, the impact this had on her child and for her time and trouble in pursuing the complaint.

CS - The parent complained that the Council delayed reviewing and updating his daughter's EHCP when she was struggling to attend her mainstream school and also failed to secure a suitable education for his daughter when she was out of education. The Ombudsman found the Council at fault as there was delay in the Council finding his daughter a new school place and a delay issuing a new EHCP. The Council also failed to ensure she received a suitable education while she was out of school. The Council has agreed to apologise to the parent and make a payment of £3,500 in recognition that his daughter did not receive a suitable education between February 2024 and September 2025 and the distress this caused.

CS - The parent complained that the Council failed to provide suitable alternative provision for her son, or the provision specified in Section F of his EHCP since September 2023 when his school placement broke down. She also complained about delays in the annual review process and in issuing a final EHCP. The Ombudsman found the Council was at fault for delays in the annual review process. The Council was also at fault for the failure to provide appropriate alternative provision and to ensure her son received the provision in his EHCP. The Council has agreed to apologise to the parent and pay her £3,550 in recognition of the missed education and SEN provision and the frustration, distress and uncertainty the Council's actions have caused her.

CS - The parent complained that the Council failed to provide alternative provision while her daughter was unable to attend school. She also complained that the Council failed to arrange transport when a place at a special school was agreed. The Ombudsman found the Council at fault for failing to provide alternative provision for approximately two and half terms. The Council has agreed to pay the parent £5,250 in recognition of the missed education between October 2023 and June 2024 and the frustration, distress and uncertainty the Council's actions have caused her.

CS - The parent complained that the Council delayed in providing alternative education to her daughter and that, when it was provided, it was unsuitable. The Ombudsman found that there was fault by the Council on the first complaint and a lost opportunity on the second but with limited injustice. The Council has agreed to make payments totalling £3,150 for the avoidable distress, the loss of education and opportunity. The Council has already amended its alternative education policy for pupils medically unfit to attend school and has agreed to consider further service improvements.

Web activity

There were almost 1.8 million page views of the main Council website in Q2, from just over 840,000 visits.

A searchable record of inquests has been developed and added to the coroner's section of the website. This allows families and other organisations to get information about inquests directly without needing to make an enquiry. As well as being more efficient for users, this frees up an estimated 12 hours of officers' time each month.

A new section of the website for ceremonies was completed and launched in Q2, replacing an externally-hosted site and reducing annual costs by around £5,000.

Media and information work

There were 387 media stories about the Council in Q2, including 46 on TV or radio. The press office dealt with 141 media enquiries and issued 33 press releases which generated 96 stories.

There was significant coverage of the Queensway Gateway Road project, the delays to completion and the opening of the road. There were a number of enquiries about flags being attached to lampposts and painted on roundabouts in Q2. LGR also continues to attract coverage.

Effective publicity and campaigns

A targeted campaign in July to raise awareness of alcohol support services saw referrals to One You East Sussex increase by 73%.

The annual summer reading challenge, encouraging children to read over the summer holidays, saw almost 6,800 children sign up. Our advertising increased the number of clicks on digital ads by 172% when compared to 2024/25.

There was an increase of 55% in new sign ups to the Flexibus service following our summer campaign (compared to the 10 weeks before the campaign). Investment in Google and YouTube adverts were particularly effective in increasing growth in the service.

A new approach to promoting the Life Transitions programme saw more people sign up than any previous recruitment efforts, with 11 new applicants during the initial campaign. Adverts directed people to an online feature which explained more about the service, which helps people preserve their wellbeing and mental health through significant life changes.

South East 7 (SE7)

SE7 Leaders met in Q2 and discussed opportunities and priorities for collective lobbying. The Board reflected on the Government's Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation, noting the particular importance for SE7 councils of the approach to Council Tax equalisation, deprivation, and the pace of transition. As the proposals raised different issues and priorities for each council, Leaders agreed to lobby individually on the Review, but also to continue to identify issues of collective interest. These included ongoing reforms in the NHS, on which Leaders continued to advocate for a strong local government voice and the protection of Adult Social Care. The Board additionally shared updates on the development of LGR proposals ahead of their submission to Government. SE7 Chief Executives also continue to meet regularly, and in Q2 discussed the progress of devolution and key challenges in budget planning.

Revenue Budget Summary

Governance Services' has a net budget of £9.377m and at Q2 is forecast to be on budget. There is an overspend in Legal Services, mostly due to the cost of locum cover for maternity leave. This is offset by staff vacancies across other services.

Performance exceptions (See How to read this report for definition)

| Performance measure | Outturn 24/25 | Target 25/26 | RAG Q1 25/26 | RAG Q2 25/26 | RAG Q3 25/26 | RAG Q4 25/26 | Q2 outturn | Note ref |
|---------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|----------|
| None | | | | | | | | |

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 |
|--|-----------------------------|--|------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Member Services | 32 | 32 | 32 | | | |
| Performance, Research and Intelligence | 99 | 99 | 99 | | | |
| Communications | 62 | 62 | 62 | | | |
| Coroners Offices | 40 | 40 | 40 | | | |
| Total Savings | 233 | 233 | 233 | 0 | 0 | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Subtotal Permanent Changes ¹ | | | | | | |
| Total Savings and Permanent Changes | 233 | 233 | 233 | 0 | 0 | |

| Memo: treatment of savings not achieved in the year (£'000) | Temporary Funding ² | Part of reported variance ³ | Total | Note Ref |
|---|--------------------------------|--|----------|----------|
| | - | - | - | |
| | - | - | - | |
| | - | - | - | |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

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

² 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).

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 2025/26 (£'000)

| Divisions | Planned Gross | Planned Income | Planned Net | Projected Gross | Projected Income | Projected Net | (Over)/ under spend Gross | (Over)/ under spend Income | (Over)/ under spend Net | Note ref |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Corporate Governance | 5,985 | (248) | 5,737 | 5,848 | (253) | 5,595 | 137 | 5 | 142 | |
| Corporate Support | 4,027 | (387) | 3,640 | 4,154 | (372) | 3,782 | (127) | (15) | (142) | |
| Total Governance | 10,012 | (635) | 9,377 | 10,002 | (625) | 9,377 | 10 | (10) | 0 | |

Capital programme 2025/26 (£'000)[illegible]