

Children's Services – Q3 2025/26

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

Early Help and Social Care

Family First Consultation Advice Line Launch

As part of our Family First programme, the Family First Consultation Advice Line was launched in Q3 to help professionals provide early support to families across East Sussex. The service aims to encourage a joined-up approach among professionals to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and reduce pressure on services. It further serves as an approach to better manage demand coming into the service.

It is available for professionals in education, health, early years, police, and voluntary/community sectors. Families themselves can also call the advice line. It offers general advice and guidance, reflection on family challenges, access to specialist support and signposting to community resources. Through the advice line professionals can access Level 2 (Early Help) advice and support from Senior Keyworkers and Team Around the Family Coordinators. If needs exceed Level 2 referrals are passed to our Single Point of Advice (SpOA).

Youth Justice Service Celebration Evening

The Youth Justice Alternative Awards evening was established in 2024 to celebrate the positive achievements of young people involved with the criminal justice system. It aims to demonstrate that these children are valued for their efforts and accomplishments, helping to reduce the stigma of a criminal identity and promote a positive sense of self-worth and future aspirations.

The 2025 event was bigger and more successful than the previous year, reflecting the growing impact of this initiative and its importance in fostering positive change.

Many of the children supported by the Youth Justice Service face challenges within education or are currently disengaged from school. Education is a significant protective factor against reoffending, and we have a responsibility to support young people in re-engaging with learning. As part of this commitment, we place a strong emphasis on AQA Awards to recognise milestones and achievements. The awards evening serves as a culmination of this hard work, providing formal recognition of the dedication and resilience shown by these young people. A parent said:

‘It makes you realise you didn’t fail your child because they got in trouble, there’s loads of children here with their parents who have had a bump in the road and are turning it around. I find that a huge comfort and reassuring his life isn’t over’.

Children in Care Awards

The 2025 Achievement Awards (Children in Care) was held at Bede’s School. 109 children were nominated in the categories of educational achievement, positive contribution, personal achievement and skills and talents. The awards were presented by the author Dame Jaqueline Wilson and Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families. The children and young people were joined by parents, carers, and social workers as well as governors and managers from the service. The award ceremony commenced with an inspirational talk from one of our care experienced young people and contributions from 2 of children in care who spoke positively about the difference that their social workers and carers had made to their lives. The event was a celebration of all that our young people achieve and as one attendee said, ‘a real reminder of why we do what we do.’

Children in Care Council National Awards

The East Sussex Children in Care Council won first place for their My Things Matter project in the Campaign Award category at the National Voice Awards 2025 in October. They attended the event along with children in care councils and care leaver forums from across the UK, to share experiences, connect and celebrate the incredible work they all do. In addition to first place, they

were also announced as the winners of the People's Choice 'All Star Award', voted as the most inspiring group or project of the day.

Residential Homes – Ofsted inspections

All East Sussex County Council Residential Children's Homes continue to be rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Brodrick House, was inspected in October 2025 and received an 'Outstanding' judgement. The judgement found that:

- children receive exceptional care from adults committed to their well-being
- the manager and adults provide them with warmth and nurture, as a result, these children thrive
- all children attend school daily. This is a significant achievement for some children. The adults have positive working relationships with the school professionals and there is a strong sense of working together for the benefit of the children
- children have exceptional experiences; adults encourage them to take part in a range of activities that help them to develop their individual interests and talents
- adults keep the children safe, and professionals are confident about this

In total 3 homes had Ofsted inspections in Q3; in addition to the Brodrick House judgement reported above, Hazel Lodge was inspected in October 2025 and Homefield Cottage in November 2025. Both homes were found to be 'Good'.

Heading Home

We launched our Heading Home strategy at a conference on 20 November, the strategy aims to support children in care to return safely to their families through a holistic and considered process. It was particularly powerful to hear from parents at the conference who have experienced their children returning to their care and highlighted the important role of social care practitioners and foster carers in this process, bringing home to everyone why this work is so important. The strategy is supported by the Valuing Care approach previously implemented in Children's Services and will enable more of the children we support to live and grow up with their own families.

Rate of children with a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000 children) (ref viii)

Following a drop in the rate of Child Protection Plans at Q2 (51.3, 532 children), there has been an increase to similar levels seen at Q1 with 55.1 (571 children) at Q3. This is above the target of 51.6 (535 children). The outturn for Q3 includes 14 pre-birth plans which do not become an active plan until the child is born, so the number of active plans is 557 for Q3. The increase is attributed to the high level of front door activity during October and November, particularly in October with 367 Family Assessments started. This measure is kept under scrutiny and is subject to on-going review, with leads meeting monthly to review all plans over 18 months. One of the key priorities is to safely reduce the volume of children subject to Child Protection Plans and Child in Need plans over time, through ensuring earlier intervention, high quality assessments and plans and effective multi-agency working. Additionally, the service is undertaking work with partners focused on how risk can be managed differently, following a recent peer audit and building on the work we are already doing around 'Safe Uncertainty' (widely used in systemic practice, to help social workers think about how they can balance risk) as part of the Family First programme.

Rate of Looked After Children (Children We Care For) (per 10,000 children)

Q3 saw an increase in the number of Children in Care to 704 (rate 67.9) an increase on both Q1 (695 children) and Q2 (689 children), this is due to a rise in the number of care proceedings, emergency orders and Section 20's, including several large sibling groups, and a lower discharge rate. During Q3, 61 children were admitted into Council care (an increase of 12 compared to Q2). 30 children were accommodated through Section 20 of the Children Act, 6 of these were separated migrant children. 11 children were admitted through emergency orders, and 20 through planned care proceedings. 39 children were discharged from care, the majority through turning 18,

with 15 being supported to return to their family network. Whilst Q3 has seen a reduction in discharges from care, the overall numbers for Q1-3 show a significant improvement compared to the same period in 2024/25, with 154 discharges compared to 87. The demand regarding adolescents with complex needs across mental health, special educational needs and social care continues to be the most challenging pressure, from both a practice and cost perspective. There is continued focus on scrutiny of children entering care, work to support them to return home or back into their network where possible.

Education

Children being permanently excluded

Work continues with schools to reduce the number of children being permanently excluded. We have seen a continued reduction in Q3. In the first two terms of this academic year (September – December) we have had 25 permanent exclusions compared to 39 for the same period last year, across all schools. Our new Alternative Provider, the East Sussex Academy continues to provide outreach to schools to support their work with children who are risk of being excluded which is having a positive impact alongside support from Council teams. The Inclusion Partnerships, where pupil referral from schools are discussed and multi-agency support for pupils is agreed, has helped prevent exclusions with 94% of the referrals made not resulting in a permanent exclusion. Feedback from schools on these meetings is very positive: ‘This is a great opportunity to hear from multi agencies’; ‘This meeting made a real difference. To feel supported was invaluable’; ‘Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement. It was good to hear that we were doing the right things as well as suggesting more ideas’.

Early Years Foundation Stage Outcomes

The Department for Education (DfE) published the final validated Early Years Foundation Stage results for summer 2025 in November. The percentage of children achieving a good level of development in East Sussex in 2025 was 70.4% compared to the national figure of 68.3%. This is an increased gap between the East Sussex and National figures compared to the previous year. The Council continues to work closely with early years settings and schools to deliver these improved outcomes. In response to the government’s policy paper ‘Giving every child the best start in life’ we have been working across Children’s Services, with settings and other key partners to draft our ‘Best Start in Life Strategy for East Sussex’ which will set out how we will work to deliver our ambitions and strategic plans for children aged 0-5 years old.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Change Programme

East Sussex is part of the Department for Education South East Change Programme Partnership which has been testing out different approaches to improving provision and support for children and young people with SEND. In advance of the anticipated Schools White Paper in early 2026 this has included work on key elements of SEND reform. We have been working with schools to develop a vision for inclusion and piloting the Local Inclusion Support Offer with a group of secondary and primary schools. As part of the Early Language Support for Every Child programme we have purchased Little Links for all our early years settings which provides resources and support to deliver speech language and communication development. An Assistive Learning Technology Lending Library has been set up which provides schools access to technology to support learners with speech communication and language difficulties.

iCAN Careers Event

In November 2025, the East Sussex Careers Hub delivered two iCAN events supporting young people, particularly those with SEND and neurodivergent need, and their families to explore post-16 education, employment, and training options. Across both events, more than 450 attendees engaged with 28 providers and employer led workshops, feedback from the young people that attended was highly positive with young people reporting increased confidence about their progression routes post-16. Funded through the ‘Internships Works’ grants, the events continue to grow as a vital, practical ‘one-stop shop’ for post-16 guidance in East Sussex.

Proportion of all new Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans issued within 20 weeks

Cumulatively for Q1 – Q3 2025/26 performance on issuing new Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans within the 20-week statutory timescale was 32.2% (Including Exception Cases) and 33.5% (Excluding Exception Cases), significantly below last year's figures of over 72%.

The major factors contributing to the decrease in performance are both late statutory advice from partners and increasingly high demand which has persisted since Q3 2024/25. EHC Needs Assessment referrals have risen 63% in three years, placing substantial strain on SEND services.

The Educational Psychology Service is experiencing particular pressure, with delays of 2–3 weeks before allocating new assessments, which slows the return of advice and impacts statutory timelines. Social care has begun to improve timeliness through additional staffing, but delays in health advice - especially from CITES - continue to affect overall performance, although backlogs there are starting to reduce.

Because of the 20-week statutory process, improvements resulting from current mitigations are unlikely to be seen until 2026/27. Significant ongoing pressure on partners due to rising assessment demand and increased need for therapeutic provision increases the risk on achieving targets for this measure.

The percentage of eligible 3 and 4-year-olds who take up a place with an eligible early year's provider (Ref iii)

The percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds taking up some or all of their free education remains just above the national average of 93.1% at 93.3%, a decrease of 2.9 percentage points. There are fewer Early Years places available for this age group this year, as additional funded hours are now available for working families with children aged 9 months and over. A low birth year moving through the system also makes the figures more volatile, as a small number of cases can have a larger impact on the percentage figure. However, despite these challenges we have seen an increase in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-old children in working families, who are also entitled to additional funded hours on top of the universal provision, taking up some or all of their free education. This cohort now makes up 53% of all 3- and 4-year-olds taking up free education.

Average Attainment 8 Score for state funded schools (ref iv and ref v)

Final data for the average Attainment 8 score for pupils at state-funded schools in the academic year 2024/25 shows that the:

- average Attainment 8 score in East Sussex was 43.1 compared to a national average of 46.0, this is below our target of 44.0
- average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils in East Sussex was 30.3 compared to the national average of 34.9, this is just below our target of 30.5

Further improvement in attainment is needed particularly in some of our larger coastal schools. There have been improvements this year, although they have come from a low base. The young people attending these academy schools account for a significant proportion of all secondary pupils in Year 11. Where schools do not perform as well, especially larger schools, this has a significant impact on the overall average for East Sussex. Attendance rates also impact on these outcomes, and this remains a key area of focus. At county level, we have seen improvement this year in the proportion of young people achieving grades 9-4 in English and Maths. We have narrowed the gap with the national average for all pupils and disadvantaged pupils on this measure, which is a key outcome for progression to post 16 learning and employment. Actions we are taking to improve secondary school attainment for the academic year 2025/26 include:

- The secondary academies in East Sussex with the highest levels of historic underperformance are in the process of transferring to new multi-academy trusts; we continue to work closely with the DfE to bring stronger trusts into the county.

- Targeting school improvement resources through the Secondary Board. This includes using our external adviser programme to deliver bespoke support as needed.
- Focusing on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. We are embedding a programme of 'Study Visits' to provide Continuing Professional Development for Headteachers and Senior Leaders. For example, so far this year we have had a Study Visit to the Chiltern Learning Trust and visit to the BETT (British Educational Training and Technology) event.
- Attendance is a critical factor when considering attainment and progress outcomes for all key stages and pupil groups. We continue to support all secondary schools to implement the statutory guidance 'Working together to improve school attendance'.

For children we care for, we continue to offer tutoring in English and Maths to all our cohort but with a focus on Year 10 and 11 students. Personal Education Plans cover the importance of revision and young people and carers are given revision advice. We are dedicated in our support for our Year 11 students, providing intensive assistance to remove obstacles that could impact their exam success. Many of our Year 11 cohort have experienced challenging circumstances which will impact on their performance. Final academic year 2024/25 average Attainment 8 scores of children we care for are expected to be available in May 2026.

The percentage of Looked After Children (Children We Care For) participating in education, training or employment at academic age 16 (Year 12) & age 17 (Year 13) (ref i and ii)

Final outcomes are reported at Q3 for both participation measures, these capture participation at academic age 16 (Year 12) and academic age 17 (Year 13). Due to the small cohort, which can mean that outturns are changeable and less predictable, these measures were reported as amber at Q2. However, targets have been exceeded for 2025/26 with 93.43% of children we care for in education, training or employment for age 16, and 74.75% for age 17. The service continues to work closely with individuals who are not currently in education, training or employment, in partnership with the Youth Employability Service to secure appropriate provision.

The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 16 and 17, including unknowns (refs vi and vii)

Due to unreliability of data the service does not report on NEET data at Q3. This is due to significant changes taking place in the autumn term, new starters in education/movement of learners and recording of the September guarantee. Final data will be reported at Q4.

Revenue Budget Summary

Based on current financial modelling, the Q3 predicted outturn for the end of 2025/26 is £173.923m. This is a forecast year-end overspend of £13.474m (ref xxiii). It is a £1.379m improvement since Q2.

In 2025/26 CSD has a net budget of £160.449m. There has been £13.301m additional budget given for growth and inflation, however £3.239m has been removed for permanent savings (ref xvi). This equates to a net increase of £10.062m. This year, all £3.239m of savings have been achieved.

The main financial pressure continues to come from the statutory demand-driven areas of children we care for, 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. However, there is an in-year forecast deficit of £26.421m on the DSG, which will result in an overall deficit by the end of 2025/26. £20.131m of the deficit is related to costs of provision for children with Education, Health and Care Plans. The statutory override has been extended until March 2028, at which point the deficit will then be offset against any remaining useable Council reserves. Recent long-term financial modelling indicates a

£90.289m cumulative DSG deficit by the end of March 2028, which is unsustainable for the Council.

Commissioning and Transformation overspend of £11.722m (ref xx)

Commissioning and Transformation is the division in which all children we care for placement expenditure sits. It has a budget of £70.055m and forecast expenditure of £81.777m at the end of 2025/26, based on current financial modelling.

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

Children We Care For (Looked After Children) placements

For 2025/26 a budget of £64.188m has been set for children we care for 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 has been transferred 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.

Children we care for placements remain the largest financial pressure within Children's Services, with a Q3 forecast overspend of £11.301m for 2025/26. This is a decrease in the overspend of £0.224m since Q2. This improvement has been achieved through a sustained and rigorous focus on commissioning activity, robust and targeted contract negotiations, ensuring that all placement and support packages are appropriately sized to meet children's needs, and strengthened oversight to hold providers to account for cost, quality and outcomes.

An £18.474m overspend is forecast on agency residential and secure placements, with £0.005m underspend forecast on agency foster carers, a £6.358m underspend on agency semi-independent living, and a £0.627m underspend forecast on in-house East Sussex foster carers.

The financial picture nationally continues to be very challenging, and East Sussex is experiencing significant cost increases in agency residential placements in common with other local authorities. This has been highlighted in recent reports published by the National Audit Office and the Local Government Association. A further report was published in January 2026 by the Public Accounts Committee on the financial sustainability of children's care homes. The Public Accounts Committee's inquiry raised concerns about the high levels of profits made by some private providers of children's social care. The report also noted that rising costs have resulted from a dysfunctional market where the need for homes in certain areas, particularly for children with complex needs, has exceeded the number of places available. The report notes that with outcomes for children not improving, and the financial costs of residential care having almost doubled over five years to £3.1 billion in 2023–24, the system is unsustainable and this layers further pressures on local authorities' finances which are already strained.

The service continues to experience challenges in relation to placements for children with a high complexity of need and this includes:

- Increase in the number of children in residential provision, from 112 in Q1 2024/25, to 120 in Q3 2024/25, to 127 in Q3 2025/26. 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. 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. The children in the top 20 highest cost placements are forecast to cost £15.691m this year, meaning that they make up 3% of the total children we care for in numbers (excluding Separated Children), but will make up 21% of the total children we care for in placement spend in 2025/26 (£75.489m).

- Increase in the average price of all placements. This is particularly significant in relation to placements costing over £10,000 per week. In Q3, we have had a decrease in the number of children in placements costing over £10,000 per week from 22 in Q2 to 18. The general increase in the number of high-cost placements is a national trend as recently highlighted in a report by the Local Government Association.

The rationale for the projected decrease in the forecast during Q3 is provided below:

- Whilst there was an increase in the cost of 59 agency placements (totalling £4.001m) relating to a small number of children requiring high-cost placements or an increase in their package of care, these increases were offset by a decrease in costs of £2.070m related to 5 agency placements. 4 of these reductions were related to children previously living in high-cost placements where they either moved home or to lower cost placements including some significant reductions in costs.
- The growth and churn figure was recalculated and reduced by £1.433m.
- There were additional health contributions of £0.535m agreed in the quarter. Total income is now £1.677m for the year.
- An increased amount of the Supported Accommodation Reform grant of £0.178m was drawn down.
- Other small movements meant there was a total reduction in the children we care for placement forecast of £0.224m.

In addition to the activity described in the sections above to try to reduce demand for statutory social care services, the following action is being undertaken to mitigate costs and reduce pressure within the children we care for budget.

- Connected Coaches – In 2025/26, Connected Coaches [edge of care] has delivered cost avoidance of £1.725m. The children we care for placement forecast would be worse off over the course of a year by this figure, if these children had not been supported to remain living with their families through the work of the service.
- 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 the Valuing Care approach. This has achieved £3.999m 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 to placements that will better meet children's needs, or to return home to live with their family if this is the right plan for the child.
- New 'Heading Home' strategy launched to support reunification planning and monitoring.
- A home finding and commissioning 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 Regional Care Cooperative to improve placement sufficiency and management across the South East. It is engaged in local frameworks which are being strengthened through the Regional Care Cooperative. The Regional Care Cooperative published a Sufficiency Statement for the South East region in November 2025;

this provides a shared understanding of what children in our region need, where the pressures lie and how we can work together to ensure every child has the right home and the right support. Development work is underway through the Regional Care Cooperative with Integrated Care Boards 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 children we care for. Based on current joint funding agreements in place with the ICB, the service is currently forecasting receiving health contributions of £1.677m in 2025/26 towards placement costs for young people with complex needs and is working hard to continue to increase this amount. This compares to £0.355m received from health to support placement spend in 2024/25.

The Commissioned Services budget is forecast to underspend by £0.068m this year due to a reduction in local authority contributions of £0.240m to the NHS required to meet increasing spend on therapeutic provision for cared for children. The CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) adoption service will also be delivered in-house and funded from this budget at a cost of £0.100m (a reduction from £0.112m when provided externally).

Localities Placements will overspend by £0.490m, which is an increase in spend of £0.336m since Q2. This is due to new placements being agreed and current placements being extended within the Children's Disability and Parent & Baby services.

Early Help and Social Care overspend of £1.833m (ref xix)

Early Help and Social Care has a budget of £46.515m and forecast expenditure of £48.348m 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 xiv).

The Early Help service is reporting a £0.101m overspend due to Keyworker staffing. A recruitment freeze is in place in order to alleviate the pressure, which has resulted in an improvement of £0.060m since Q1.

The Locality Social Work and Family Assessment service is forecasting a £0.957m overspend. This is an increase in spend of £0.044m since Q2.

Following assessment, 3 young people were accommodated through the Youth Homelessness pathway, which increased spend by £0.079m. Annual reviews were carried out of Family and Friends Allowances, which increased the forecast by £0.126m.

These pressures were mitigated by a £0.056m reduction in staff costs, and a £0.100m reduction in support packages funded under Section 17. There were also £0.005m other small mitigations.

The Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) team works with social care teams to safely reduce the number of children subject to Child Protection and Child in Need plans and entering care. CFIP has delivered cost avoidance of £1.699m in 2025/26 through their interventions with families. The Localities forecast spend for a year would be worse off by this figure if the service had not prevented these cases from escalating or being readmitted to the service. This service is considered essential in delivering cost avoidance and savings through preventive interventions and supporting reunification with families. It is also key to the Government's social care reforms through the Families First Programme.

There is a £0.744m pressure within Specialist Services. This is an increase in forecast spend of £0.041m since Q2. £0.108m of this movement is within Youth Justice with 2 new children being remanded. The Council will receive grant funding from the Ministry of Justice towards these remands 2 years in arrears. To offset this, there was a £0.067m mitigation in small staffing movements.

There is £2.929m set aside within the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the Localities/Specialist Services pressures in 2026/27. 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 and some reshaping.

The Children We Care For staffing budget is forecast to be £0.164m overspent, which is an improvement of £0.087m since Q2.

The Separated Children forecast has reduced by £0.049m meaning there is now a £0.166m underspend. This is due to a recalculation of the placement income forecast following feedback from the Home Office after the year's first two data returns.

Communication, Planning and Performance (including Home to School Transport) overspend of £0.888m (ref xxii)

Communication, Planning and Performance has a budget of £33.612m and forecast expenditure of £34.499m 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 2025/26 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 £0.006m. As part of the proposed transfer of Buzz Active to Bedes the saving (**ref xi**) was deducted from the budget at the beginning of the year. Buzz Active will now be retained by the Council. In year mitigations are being sought including staffing structures and management of activity equipment in relation to both sales and purchasing. There has also been some additional income agreed over winter, which has led to a £0.013m reduction in the overspend since Q2.

There were forecast reductions in spend of £0.003m in Equalities and Participation and E Business. These were offset by forecast increases in spend of £0.071m within Planning and Performance, Safeguarding, Organisational Development, and Miscellaneous CPP.

Home to School Transport has a forecast overspend of £1.050m. This is a decrease in spend of £0.386m since Q2, due to a reduction in SEND solo client numbers, increased route optimisation, and additional Dedicated School Grant income for eligible SEND pupils requiring transport.

The year-on-year growth in pupil numbers and the average pupil cost of providing transport are the key factors in the increasing cost of HTST provision. Between 2021/22 and 2024/25 there was an average year on year growth of eligible pupils by 14%.

Over the same period, the average cost of transport provision increased by over 40%. Despite these year-on-year increases, the rate of increase of the average unit cost per pupil has reduced from 15% in 2023/24 down to a 5% increase in 2024/25. This reduction in the rate of increase directly correlates to cost avoidance activities.

The Home to School Transport forecast is 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. The forecast was refreshed in November when all the invoices relating to the cohort of children in this new academic year had been processed.

Of the forecast £29.223m spend, 77% relates to clients with SEND. Spend on these clients is set to increase by 12% since 2024/25. This is linked both to EHC Plan numbers and unit costs increasing.

Significant work has gone into implementing cost reduction measures within the Home to School Transport service. Routes optimised for the new academic year are underway, with 60% of new pupils having been added to existing transport routes. The focus has been on the 25 schools where 75% of SEND pupils are being transported. The savings on taxis have been calculated at £0.200m per year (**ref xii**), and work is ongoing to quantify the results of the rest of the work which is why we anticipate increasing the amount of savings.

A new Personal Transport Budget strategy has been rolled out and 184 families were contacted with the enhanced offer. To date, a small number of families have accepted and been transferred from a solo taxi contract, resulting in £0.218m annual saving (also included in **ref xii**). This is combined with the £0.200m saving mentioned above to produce the total reported saving of £0.418m. In Q3, the overall number of Personal Travel Budgets increased from 214 to 240.

Education underspend of £0.937m (ref xxi)

Education has a budget of £153.643m and forecast outturn expenditure of £152.706m 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 x**). This has been achieved through a review of staffing and resources across several education teams, along with a reduction in spend on external consultants.

SEND and Safeguarding is showing an overspend of £0.205m. This has remained the same since Q2.

Inclusion and Partnerships is showing an underspend of £0.228m. This increased by £0.053m since Q2 due to some minor staffing changes.

Participation and Planning is showing an underspend of £0.914m. A small legal fees pressure (£0.002m) within School Organisation was offset by: £0.110m staffing mitigations within Admin, £0.100m staffing mitigations in senior management and consultancy, and the retention of £0.800m additional Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant.

Central Resources underspend of £0.031m (ref xviii)

Central Resources has a budget of £1.404m and forecast expenditure of £1.373m at the end of 2025/26. The underspend has reduced by £0.146m in Q3, due to the part-year impact of the 23% increase in the cost of counsel fees.

Whilst savings of £0.229m were approved as part of budget-setting (ref xiii), 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 xvii). An additional saving related to the consolidation of back-office functions is taking place, but the restructures required will not occur until after 2025/26.

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

Capital Programme Summary

The total capital budget for 2025/26 is £2.789m and the forecast spend is £2.609m, an underspend of £0.180m (ref xxvi).

There is £0.116m underspend within Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers, due to some expected projects being slipped into 2026/27 (ref xxiv).

There is £0.064m underspend within the Essential System Developments project (ref xxv). As part of the drive to bring the project back into budget, one of the posts has been made redundant, and £0.064m of the license costs have been slipped into 2026/27.

All other projects are forecast to be on budget.

Performance exceptions

Priority – Driving sustainable economic growth

Performance measure	Outturn 24/25	Target 25/26	RAG Q1 25/26	RAG Q2 25/26	RAG Q3 25/26	RAG Q4 25/26	Q3 outturn	Note ref
The percentage of LAC participating in education, training or employment at academic age 16 (Year 12)	85.25%	80%	G	A	G		93.43%	i
The percentage of LAC participating in education, training or employment at academic age 17 (Year 13)	78%	70%	G	A	G		74.75%	ii
The percentage of eligible 3 and 4-year-olds who take up a place with an eligible early year's provider	95.7% Nat Av: 94.9%	Equal to or above the national average	G	G	A		ESCC: 93.3% Nat AV: 93.1%	iii

Average Attainment 8 Score for state funded schools	Ac Year 2023/24 ESCC: 43.1 Nat Av: 46.0	Ac Year 2024/25: 44.0	G	G	R		Ac Year 2024/25 ESCC: 43.0 Nat Av: 45.9	iv
Average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils	Ac Year 2023/24 ESCC: 30.1 Nat Av: 34.9	Ac Year 2024/25: 30.5	G	G	R		Ac Year 2024/25 ESCC: 30.3 Nat Av: 34.9	v
The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 16, including unknowns	4.2%	Equal to or below 5%	G	G	A		Final data shared at Q4	vi
The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 17, including unknowns	5.7%	Equal to or below 7%	G	G	A		Final data shared at Q4	vii

Priority – Keeping Vulnerable People Safe

Performance measure	Outturn 24/25	Target 25/26	RAG Q1 25/26	RAG Q2 25/26	RAG Q3 25/26	RAG Q4 25/26	Q3 outturn	Note ref
Rate of children with a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000 children)	59.3 (614 children)	51.6 (535 children)	G	G	A		55.1 (571 children)	viii

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
Children We Care For	1,593	1,593	1,593	-	-	ix
Education	360	360	360	-	-	x
Buzz Active	107	107	-	107	-	xi
Home to School Transport	728	728	418	310	-	xii
All divisions	229	229	5	122	102	xiii
Supporting Families programme	100	100	100	-	-	xiv
Communication, Planning and Performance	122	122	122	-	-	xv
Total Savings	3,239	3,239	2,598	539	102	xvi
Attendance			102	-	(102)	xvii
All divisions			-	-	-	
Subtotal Permanent Changes ¹			102	0	(102)	
Total Savings and Permanent Changes	3,239	3,239	2,700	539	0	

Memo: treatment of savings not achieved in the year (£'000)	Temporary Funding ²	Part of reported variance ³	Total	Note Ref
Savings underachieved in-year	-	539	539	
Total	0	539	539	

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
Central Resources	3,563	(2,159)	1,404	3,242	(1,869)	1,373	321	(290)	31	xviii
Early Help and Social Care	58,862	(12,347)	46,515	64,561	(16,213)	48,348	(5,699)	3,866	(1,833)	xix
Commissioning and Transformation	75,889	(5,834)	70,055	91,824	(10,047)	81,777	(15,935)	4,213	(11,722)	xx
Education	303,931	(150,288)	153,643	308,928	(156,222)	152,706	(4,997)	5,934	937	xxi
Communication, Planning and Performance	37,861	(4,249)	33,612	39,967	(5,468)	34,499	(2,106)	1,219	(887)	xxii
Schools	148,315	(148,315)	-	148,315	(148,315)	-	-	-	-	
DSG Non Schools	-	(144,780)	(144,780)	-	(144,780)	(144,780)	-	-	-	

Total CSD	628,421	(467,972)	160,449	656,837	(482,914)	173,923	(28,416)	14,942	(13,474)	xxiii
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Capital programme 2025/26 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget 2025/26	Actual to date Q3	Projected 2025/26	Variation (Over) / under 2025/26 budget	Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend	Variation analysis: Slippage to future year	Variation analysis: Spend in advance	Note ref
Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers' Homes	1,521	1,521	430	187	314	116	-	-	116	xxiv
Schools Delegated Capital	32,255	32,255	1,150	976	1,150	-	-	-	-	
Conquest Centre redevelopment	342	342	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Hastings & Rother Skills LUP	1,000	1,000	93	84	93	-	-	-	-	
Youth Investment Fund	193	193	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Youth Service Resource Bus LUP	53	53	53	52	53	-	-	-	-	
Children's Services Essential System Developments	1,461	1,461	1,063	740	999	64	-	-	64	xxv
Total CSD	36,825	36,825	2,789	2,039	2,609	180	0	0	180	xxvi