

Summary comments for Cabinet – People Scrutiny RPPR Board (11.12.25)

1.1. The People Scrutiny RPPR Board met on the 11 December 2025 and agreed comments to be put to Cabinet, on behalf of the parent Committee, for its consideration in January 2026. The information supplied to the Board to support its discussions comprised of:

- December RPPR Update report to Cabinet
- CIPFA local authority efficiency toolkit; and
- the draft portfolio plans for the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) and Children’s Services Departments (CSD)

1.2. The Board met before the provisional local government finance settlement 2026-2027 was published and therefore the Board was not able to comment in detail on the Council’s budgetary position.

1.3. The comments of the People Scrutiny RPPR Board are set out below:

Financial outlook

1.4 The Board expressed its concern about the financial position of the Council, although acknowledged the significant pressures facing local government and commented that there was insufficient funding for the sector to meet increasing demand for services and increasing complexity of need.

1.5 The Board discussed the outcome of the Government’s Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation and although it was acknowledged that detailed allocations would be set out in the awaited provisional local government finance settlement, the Board expressed concern about the impact new funding formulae were expected to have on ESCC.

1.6 The Board discussed the announcement in the Autumn Budget Statement that SEND will in future (from 2028/29) be funded through central Government and raised concerns that this would not address SEND deficits up to this point and that this funding would be at the detriment of other funding streams.

1.7 The Board expressed confidence that the Council had taken significant steps to address its financial deficit, including lobbying for additional funding, generating income, and implementing savings and efficiencies, and that the Council’s self-assessment against the CIPFA local authority efficiency toolkit provided a robust evidence base that efficiencies identified by other local authorities had also been explored.

1.8 The Board recognised the limited options remaining to set a balanced budget for 2026/27, including identifying further savings and preparing to seek Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), however expressed significant concerns about the impacts of these. The Board acknowledged the considerable number of savings previously made and, although accepted that the Council was still able to deliver its statutory duties, was very concerned about its ability to do so in the future if further savings were identified and the significant impact this would then have on residents, staff and partners. The Board commented that with increasing need and demand for services, further savings increased risk to vulnerable adult and children.

1.9 The Board discussed the proposed CSD saving to stop the payment of term-time accommodation for university students who are care leavers and expressed that

whilst the need for this saving was understood, in light of the financial context, it was regrettable that this support for care leavers would not continue.

1.0 The Board discussed the potential outcomes of applying for EFS and expressed concern about the prospect of raising Council Tax above the referendum limit, acknowledging that East Sussex residents already paid a relatively high rate, and wished to highlight that although permission to raise Council Tax significantly was unlikely, an increase of 18% would be necessary to fully address the deficit and set a balanced budget. In discussing the potential impact of receiving EFS in the form of permission for additional borrowing, the Board expressed concern about the increasing debt this would generate for the Council, and the subsequent impact this would have on East Sussex residents.

1.11 The Board discussed public awareness about the challenging financial context local government was operating in, noting some misconceptions, and highlighted the need for stronger messaging on increased demand, the impact on council services and ongoing sector challenges.

Children's Services draft portfolio plan

1.12 The Board received an overview from the Director of CSD of the draft CSD portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2026/2027.

1.13 The Board welcomed the priorities and developments contained within the plan and recognised the ambitious work to transform and provide services within a challenging context, including significant national reforms.

1.14 The Board welcomed the department's approach to addressing high demand and costs in Home to School Transport, however acknowledged that national reforms and legislative changes were needed to fully address ongoing challenges in SEND support.

Adult Social Care and Health draft portfolio plan

1.15 The Board received an overview from the Director of ASCH of the draft ASCH portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2026/2027.

1.16 The Board acknowledged the challenging context the department was operating in, with increased demand for services, and praised staff for their ongoing work to deliver statutory services.

1.17 The Board discussed wider financial challenges in the health sector, noting NHS funding pressures, and expressed the need to closely monitor the impacts of reductions and changes to Integrated Care Boards.