

## **Summary comments for Cabinet – Place Scrutiny RPPR Board (16.12.25)**

Present: Councillors Matthew Beaver (Chair), Chris Collier, Ian Hollidge, Philip Lunn, Steve Murphy, Paul Redstone, Stephen Shing, David Tutt and Brett Wright.

1.1. The Place Scrutiny RPPR Board met on the 16 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 Business Services (BSD), Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) and Governance Services (GS) departments

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 Place Scrutiny RPPR Board are set out below:

### Approach to savings

1.4 The Board explored the approach taken to identifying savings for 2026/27, and acknowledged the difficulty in identifying new savings given the amount the Council has made historically. The Board recognised that the savings proposals for 2026/27 would not be enough to close the deficit, and therefore it understood the need for the Council to explore the possibility of applying for Exceptional Financial Support from government.

1.5 The Board received assurance on a number of areas of spend to ensure that the Council has explored savings in all possible areas. This included considering whether the Council was able to exit contracts early where possible, avoiding the use of consultants wherever capability to deliver work may exist in-house, and reducing street lighting levels where safe to do so.

1.6 The Board received assurance that the proposed winter gritting saving would not see the percentage of the county's network treated become out of line with similar shire county areas, and there would still be gritting on key routes.

### Income maximisation

1.7 The Board discussed the importance of the Council seeking to maximise its income to reduce the deficit, including through raising fees and charges for services where possible. The Board acknowledged there are issues related to increasing parking charges, in that if they rise too much it can result in a fall in revenue, as well as the statutory limitations on the generation and use of parking surpluses.

1.8 The Board received assurance that Trading Standards services would be able to continue to generate income through the Proceeds of Crime Act.

1.9 The Board noted that Active Travel England (ATE) had rated ESCC's active travel grade as Level 1 due to its perception of challenges with delivering schemes in East Sussex. The Board felt this was disappointing and noted the importance of the

Council seeking to improve its ATE rating as it would help leverage greater amounts of national funding into the county for active travel schemes.

#### Working with others

1.10 The Board discussed the possibility of town and parish councils taking on responsibility for services where the Council was no longer able to fund them, noting that there is no cap on their ability to precept. The Board suggested that the Council should explore where town and parish councils could take on responsibility for services where the community wishes to see services to continue, but ESCC is unable to continue to deliver them.

1.11 The Board discussed local government reorganisation and suggested that, presuming the One East Sussex proposal is taken forward, conversations begin as early as possible between ESCC and district and borough councils on opportunities for collaboration and joint working between teams to deliver cost savings prior to vesting day of the new unitary in 2028.

#### Portfolio Plans

1.12 The Board reviewed draft departmental Portfolio Plans and noted the key challenges and developments services would be responding to in the coming year.

1.13 The Board discussed the approach to reducing carbon emissions from the Council's own operations and what it was possible to fund given the financial position. The Board welcomed that the Council would explore where it could reduce emissions through business as usual work, but recognised the context in which the Council was operating. In this context, the Board understood the reasoning why more could not be done given financial constraints, but felt that this was regrettable.