

National and Local Policy Outlook 2021

1. Introduction and Contents

1.1. The work of the County Council, in terms of the services we deliver and the way they are delivered, is informed and influenced by a continually changing operating context. This context includes national priorities, policy and legislation set by Government; economic, social and health trends (set out in more detail in Appendix 1); and local priorities, programmes and partnerships.

1.2. This appendix outlines the current and anticipated developments in this operating context, which will need to be taken into account in our Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) planning for the 2022/23 financial year and beyond. Nationally, new Government policy and legislation is focussed on responding to Britain's exit from the European Union (EU); the wide-ranging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people, the economy and public services; and climate change. Government has also announced a range of public service reform initiatives, including for health and social care. Locally, we are responding to the same developments and Government reforms, whilst also adapting services to embed learning from, and positive ways of working during, the pandemic. Further detail on all of these areas is provided below.

1.3. This appendix does not necessarily need to be read in order. It is intended to be a reference document for Members to look to for detail on key national and local developments impacting East Sussex County Council (ESCC), throughout the coming months of business and budget planning. There is a broad range of detailed content covered and Members may wish to navigate directly to sections using the contents below. There are also markers included throughout where topics link to other areas of the appendix.

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2. Overall Context

COVID-19

2.1. In February, the Government published its 'COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021' which outlined a phased 'roadmap' out of lockdown. The decision to progress at each step of the roadmap has been based on meeting four tests: that vaccine

deployment continues successfully, vaccines are effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths, infection rates do not risk unsustainable pressure on the NHS, and the assessment of risks is not changed by new Variants of Concern. The Government's intention is that the relaxation of restrictions is cautiously managed so that further lockdowns are not required in future.

2.2. In light of increasing cases of the Delta COVID-19 variant and hospitalisations, full progress to step 4 of the roadmap (removing limits on social contact, opening remaining business premises and removing limits on large events) has been deferred to 19 July to provide time for all adults over the age of 18 to have been offered their first vaccine. Continuation of restrictions, including social distancing and wearing face coverings impacts the way we deliver a number of Council activities and services.

2.3. There will need to be a longer-term, national approach to managing the ongoing presence of COVID-19 in the population and potential future increases in infections. We can expect the approach, and any need for future restrictions or Government interventions, to be informed by the effectiveness of vaccinations and treatments, emergence of any further Variants of Concern and the impact of future infection rates on the NHS. The Government has established a new UK Health Security Agency (see 4.9 - 4.10 below) which will combine elements of NHS Test and Trace, the Joint Biosecurity Centre and Public Health England and in its initial phase of operation, will continue to provide scientific, intellectual and operational leadership in the COVID-19 response. ESCC's ongoing approach to outbreak control and management is set out at 4.2 – 4.8 below.

2.4. Parts of the Government's approach to recovery from COVID-19 are outlined throughout this appendix. Longer-term impacts on ESCC services and changes to working brought by the pandemic are also outlined throughout.

Economic Outlook

2.5. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has assessed the impact and provided forecasts on the impact of COVID-19 on the UK economy and public finances throughout the pandemic. The latest forecast in March projected that rollout of vaccines and easing of public health restrictions would fuel a rapid recovery in economic output this year, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) returning to pre-pandemic output by the middle of 2022, six months faster than previously forecast in November 2020.

2.6. The forecast noted that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough), grants for the self-employed, and grants and guaranteed loans to businesses have played an important role in keeping viable businesses going, but have to some extent delayed, rather than avoided, unemployment and business insolvencies. These are expected to arise when Government support ends later this year.

2.7. 60,400 jobs in East Sussex were being supported by furlough or the self-employed support scheme at 31 January 2021. The latest provisional figures from Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) suggest this had decreased to just over 42,000 at the end of April. We expect this number to have reduced further at the next data publication as lockdown restrictions have eased and retail, hospitality and

leisure businesses have returned to operation. The true extent of the impact of COVID-19 on local employment, and in turn on demand for local services, will not be clear until Government employment support ends later this year.

2.8. The pandemic has already led to a sharp increase in the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits:

- 18,450 people in East Sussex were claiming Universal Credit (UC) (searching for work) or Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) in May 2021.
- This was down 5.9% on the previous month, but up 102% (9,315 claimants) on March 2020.
- 5.8% of our working age population were claiming UC (searching for work) or JSA in May, lower than the rate in England (6.1%) but higher than the rate for the South East region (4.9%).
- Youth unemployment has been rising faster – 10.2% of people aged 18-24 were claiming UC (searching for work) or JSA in May 2021, compared with 4.9% in March 2020.

2.9. We would anticipate an increase in local unemployment to result in an increase in demand for support across our services. Detail on the developments informing our approach to supporting economic recovery and local businesses is set out at section 9 of this appendix.

National Economic Recovery

2.10. The Queen's Speech in May set out the Government's programme for the new Parliamentary session, with a focus on delivering a pandemic recovery that 'makes the UK stronger, healthier and more prosperous.' The speech re-affirmed that the Government is committed to 'build back better', harnessing opportunities and learning from the COVID-19 pandemic; as well as responding to existing societal issues and those arising from the pandemic.

2.11. The central ambition to the Government's plans for COVID-19 recovery, particularly economic recovery, is to 'level up' the country. In the Queen's Speech, this was defined as 'boosting jobs, driving growth and innovation, increasing opportunity for everyone, and ensuring everyone has access to excellent public services, regardless of where they live.' A Levelling Up White Paper is to be delivered later this year, with policy interventions to improve livelihoods and opportunity. This may have implications, and present opportunities, for ESCC's work to drive sustainable economic growth. The Levelling Up White Paper replaces the previously planned Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper, which had been expected to tie Government's plans for economic recovery and renewal to agreement of new devolution deals. The Levelling Up White Paper will be developed by a joint No.10 – Cabinet Office Unit, and informed by Neil O'Brien, MP for Harborough, whom the Prime Minister has appointed as national Levelling Up Advisor. Other key elements of the Government's levelling up agenda include the Levelling Up Fund (see 9.6 – 9.8 below), UK Community Renewal Fund (see 9.4 – 9.5. below) and Towns Fund.

2.12. The Levelling Up White Paper follows the Treasury's Plan for Growth, published earlier this year. This set out that the Government's three pillars of growth are infrastructure, skills and innovation; and that Government's ambition for

economic growth is to deliver three strategic aims: level up the whole of the UK (through regenerating struggling areas, for example), support the transition to net zero (growing net zero industries and creating new ones); and support the vision for 'Global Britain' (championing openness to fair and free trade, for example). These strategic aims will need to be considered in our planning and work, such as in making bids to Government funding for economic development.

Brexit

2.13. The UK fully ceased to be a member of the EU on 31 December 2020 when the transition period came to an end. A new Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the EU was agreed in December 2020, governing arrangements between the EU and UK on a range of areas such as trade in goods and in services, digital trade, intellectual property, public procurement, aviation and road transport, energy, fisheries, social security coordination, law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters. The long-term impact of this agreement on the UK's economy and public services remains to be seen, including the opportunities it could present for new policy making and legislative development.

2.14. A key area of impact for East Sussex will be in implementation of new border checks at Newhaven Port. After the trade deal was agreed, the Government published a Border Operating Model to outline how the borders would be managed in future. Within this model, it was intended to begin documentary checks on goods from 1 April 2021 and physical checks on goods from 1 July 2021. However, these requirements have been delayed until 1 October 2021 (documentary checks) and 1 January 2022 (physical checks). At the time of writing, we are awaiting the publication of an amended Border Operating Model to reflect this announcement. ESCC Trading Standards continue to liaise with the Port and UK Border Force to prepare for these checks (see further detail at 7.14 – 7.15 below).

3. Adult Social Care and Health

Coronavirus Impact and Recovery

3.1. The following sections outline the key developments impacting, or expected to impact, Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) services during recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 ASCH Recovery

3.2. *Adult Social Care & Health Programme:* To consider how the department could continue to provide services to those who need them safely, effectively and efficiently during the coronavirus pandemic, an Adult Social Care and Health Programme was established. In the wake of COVID-19, the programme (due to end in August 2021) is taking the opportunity to look back to understand, reflect and reprioritise our approach, ensuring that any efficiencies and lessons learnt are built into future service provision. The programme covers all aspects of ASCH, from initial contact and assessment, through to financial assessment and service delivery. Specific work is taking place to embed the benefits of increased use of technology in ASCH services during the pandemic (see 12.13 below for more detail).

3.3. We know that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected certain groups in society including those with learning disabilities, mental health problems, long-term

health conditions, and from some minority ethnic groups. ASCH is involved in a number of initiatives to support different groups, including through additional research, targeted communications, prioritisation of support and support to staff.

3.4. *Long-covid*: a significant proportion of people infected with COVID-19 will experience continuing symptoms or 'long-covid' and there is evidence some will have complex health needs months after they fell ill. This may have profound consequences on the demand for social care services. There is limited understanding of how long these healthcare needs last and ASCH will work alongside the NHS COVID-19 Recovery programme to ensure a joint approach is taken to health and social care needs.

3.5. *NHS Recovery*: The NHS and County Council, as part of the Integrated Care System, are developing local health and care priorities that reflect the needs of the local population and maximise hospital capacity to inform a plan for recovery. The plan will outline how the health and care system meets new care demands and reduces the backlogs that are a direct consequence of the pandemic, whilst supporting staff recovery and taking further steps to address inequalities in access, experience and outcomes.

Care Market Support and Resilience

3.6. During the pandemic, the challenges faced by the care market have been significant and have varied according to the type of service. Council staff have liaised closely with providers throughout to support them to adapt their services and meet people's needs in alternative ways to ensure residents remain supported.

3.7. There has been an increase in homecare placements of approximately 15% during the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to temporary closure of care homes to new admissions due to COVID-19 outbreaks. As a result of furlough and unemployment in other sectors, recruitment to home care roles increased significantly and the homecare market has been able to meet the increased demand. The block hour arrangement with three of the County Council's lead providers (commissioning blocks of time up front), which is usually limited to short term busy periods, is in place and has been throughout the pandemic, to help patients return home from hospital when they are medically ready.

3.8. COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the challenges facing independent sector providers. A Market Resilience and Sustainability Project Group has been established to look at areas of the social care market where concerns have been identified in terms of overall capacity; ability to meet the needs of our local population; and general concerns about market sustainability.

Compulsory vaccinations for care home staff

3.9. The Government has announced that people working in Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered care homes will need to be fully vaccinated with two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine from October, unless they are medically exempt. The decision is subject to Parliamentary approval and a subsequent 16-week grace period. It will apply to all workers employed directly by a care home or care home provider, those employed by an agency and deployed by a care home, and volunteers deployed in a care home. We will work with providers to monitor the

impact of the new requirement on recruitment and retention within the local care sector.

Mental Health Recovery Action Plan

3.10. The Government has committed £500m to expand mental health services as part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Recovery Action Plan. This fund aims to respond to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the public, specifically targeting groups which have been most impacted, including those with severe mental illness, young people, and frontline staff.

3.11. Nationally, approximately forty percent of this funding will be used to accelerate delivery of key mental health commitments outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan in 2021/22, including extra support in the community for adults with severe mental illness. Funding will also be used to support prevention activities like debt advice, carers support, outreach to people facing loneliness and isolation and community groups.

3.12. ESCC will develop a person-centred approach, to mirror the Action Plan, focussing on resilience and self-help. Further integrated working between ESCC and the NHS, as well as the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE), will enable people who use services and their carers to receive seamless, joined-up support. The Council will also use data and insight to achieve a joint understanding of provision across all sectors to help shape future market requirements that meet the needs of the population.

3.13. Early studies indicate that the pandemic affected those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Alongside this, prolonged social isolation and successive lockdowns have harmed people's mental and emotional wellbeing. It is in this context that a comprehensive review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation in East Sussex will shortly commence and will benefit from a reference group drawn from Members of the People Scrutiny Committee.

Development of a partnership approach to community wellbeing

3.14. Five Community Hubs were set up at the start of the pandemic to offer a local point of contact and support for people struggling to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Contact arrangements are still in place in each district and borough council and have been absorbed into existing contact centres to meet any ongoing need.

3.15. District and borough councils and VCSE sector have been central in providing localised support for residents and enabling community wellbeing. The County Council has provided leadership, facilitated the partnership approach, and administered a range of grants to support the resilience of local community services.

3.16. The County Council took the lead on supporting the residents identified as the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) group, who were advised to shield during the pandemic. With the support of partner organisations, the Council ensured that CEV people were contacted and their needs assessed, ensuring access to information, food, medicines or basic support where this was required.

3.17. These partnerships, and the resultant work undertaken during the pandemic, are being developed to strengthen community wellbeing in the longer term. A partnership approach to community wellbeing will help us build on the collaborative work during the pandemic and continue to pool our resources and expertise across local government, the wider public sector and the VCSE sector to help our communities recover and thrive. Funding has been ringfenced to develop these approaches during 2021 and create a longer-term vision and model for community-based wellbeing.

Social Care Reform

3.18. The following sections outline national changes and reforms expected to impact delivery of ASCH services in future.

National reform

3.19. The Government has long committed to national reform of the adult social care system, to ensure provision is sustainable, equitably funded and affordable to those who require it. The Queen's Speech in May stated that proposals on social care reform will be brought forward by the Government but did not commit to legislation in this Parliament. This leaves local government still waiting for a tangible sustainable solution to the issues of demographic change and the increasing costs of care funding.

3.20. An inquiry has been launched by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee into the effect of COVID-19 on adult social care and the long-term funding required following the pandemic.

Reforming the Mental Health Act

3.21. The Government is proposing a wide range of changes to rebalance the Mental Health Act (MHA), the main piece of legislation that covers the assessment, treatment and rights of people with a mental health disorder, to put patients at the centre of decisions about their own care and ensure everyone is treated equally. The changes are based on four principles that have been developed with people with experience of the MHA. They are choice and autonomy (ensuring service users' views and choices are respected); ensuring the MHA's powers are used in the least restrictive way; therapeutic benefit (ensuring patients are supported to get better, so they can be discharged from the MHA); and treating the person as an individual.

3.22. ESCC will implement the changes outlined for local authorities within the Act alongside the Mental Health National Service Framework to improve the way mental health services are delivered. This will be reflected in both policy and practice to ensure people have a better experience when accessing information, assessment and treatment. In keeping with the new legislation, ESCC will develop services that people will value and use and enable them to seek help earlier.

National Strategy for Disabled People

3.23. The Cabinet Office's Disability Unit is developing a National Strategy for Disabled People with publication planned for later in 2021. The Disability Unit is working with different agencies (including disabled people, carers, parents and other people who have an interest in disability issues) to achieve practical changes that

will remove barriers and increase participation. The strategy will build on evidence and data, and critically, on insights from disabled people. It will include existing commitments, such as increasing special educational needs and disability funding; careers advice; internships and transition into work programmes; whilst identifying further opportunities to enable positive change.

3.24. The Council is committed to making practical changes to policies and guidance which strengthen disabled people's ability to participate fully in society. ESCC will ensure that the lived experience of the local population underpins policies by identifying what matters most to disabled people and disabled people's organisations and, in turn, use this insight to drive real change.

'Data Saves Lives' – health and social care data strategy

3.25. At the end of June, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) published a new data strategy for the health and social care system, aiming to ensure the system is underpinned by high quality, readily available data. Building on the effective, innovative and timely use of data and insights in the pandemic response, the strategy aims to inspire collaboration within the NHS and between the NHS, adult social care and public health, to improve outcomes, people's experience of health and social care services and planning across sectors at the local and national level.

3.26. Commitments made in the strategy include introduction of a statutory duty for organisations within the health and care system to share anonymous patient data; and inclusion of adult social care providers (where they have digitised records) in shared health record solutions. The strategy is therefore expected to have implications for ESCC and social care in East Sussex and we will work with our partners to understand and respond to these. The Government's ambition to use data and insights to improve health outcomes and services aligns to the ambitions of the ASCH 'Being Digital Strategy' (see 12.13).

Health and social care integration

3.27. The following sections outlines progress, next steps and national reform on work to integrate health and social care services to achieve better outcomes, improve patient experience and use public funds more efficiently.

Integration and innovation – NHS White Paper and Health and Care Bill

3.28. The NHS White Paper 'Integration and Innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all' was published in February. It builds on policies set out in the NHS Long Term Plan and in the 'Integrating Care' paper published by the NHS in 2020. The White Paper forms the basis of a Health and Care Bill that will go through Parliament later in 2021 and is expected to become law by April 2022. The Government has explained that it is not intended as a comprehensive package of reforms and should be considered alongside broader reforms to social care (see 3.19 - 3.20), public health (see 4.9 – 4.10) and mental health (see 3.10 - 3.13 and 3.21 - 3.22).

3.29. The White Paper aims to remove some of the barriers to integration within the NHS, and between the NHS and local government and wider partners, through setting out a range of changes to accelerate improvements that need primary

legislation. An Integrated Care System (ICS) NHS body, with a unitary board, will be created to be accountable for NHS spending, performance and meeting patients' needs. NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts will remain separate statutory bodies, with their functions and duties broadly unchanged.

3.30. The proposals in the White Paper recognise the need for two forms of integration: firstly, integration within the NHS to remove cumbersome barriers to collaboration, to make working together across the NHS an organising principle and move away from competition; and, secondly, integration between the NHS and others, principally local authorities, to improve health and wellbeing for local people. In line with the latter, a wider ICS Health and Care Partnership will have responsibility for developing a plan that addresses the broader health, public health, and social care needs of the system. The potential scope of this partnership work includes:

- working together to develop partnership approaches to community wellbeing (see 3.14 – 3.17 above);
- developing a systems approach to tackling loneliness and social isolation; and
- primary care developments and Primary Care Network delivery (including Population Health Management, multi-disciplinary team working and care coordination).

3.31. In line with this, system partners are shaping the next steps for strengthening joint working to meet the needs of the diverse communities within East Sussex, to improve population health and improve social and economic wellbeing more broadly to help reduce health inequalities.

3.32. Other proposals within the White Paper include:

- A duty to collaborate placed on NHS organisations (both ICSs and providers) and local authorities;
- Allowance of ministerial intervention in NHS service reconfigurations at any point of the process, as well as removing the current local authority referral process to avoid creating any conflicts of interest;
- A new duty for the CQC to assess local authorities' delivery of their adult social care duties;
- Embedding in law the 'Discharge to Assess' approach to discharging people from hospital. In East Sussex, this builds on our 'Home First' approach with the active principle of assessing a person's future care needs in their own home or care home to support their independence. This approach has been embedded during the pandemic; and
- The challenges faced in accessing comprehensive and accurate data from independent sector providers has been recognised. Data is to be collected through provider systems and existing data sets.

Local health and social care integration

3.33. There is a history and shared commitment to integrated working with the local NHS, as this provides the opportunity to deliver the best possible outcomes for residents and achieves the best use of collective public funding in East Sussex. ESCC is a lead member of the Health and Social Care Partnership, which is overseen by the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board. The partnership includes representation from: district and borough councils; East Sussex NHS Clinical

Commissioning Group (CCG); East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT); Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust (SCFT); Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT); Primary Care Networks; Healthwatch; and the VCSE sector.

3.34. As well as having a lead role in the East Sussex system, local organisations are part of the wider Sussex Health and Care Partnership (SHCP). The SHCP was awarded ICS status in 2020. The NHS White Paper (see 3.28 - 3.32 above) intends for ICSs in England to have legal status from April, when they would absorb the healthcare commissioning functions of CCGs.

3.35. The East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board has an agreed shared outcomes framework for our health and social care system. This steers our aims and planning in four key areas: population health and wellbeing; quality care and support; the experience of local people; and transforming services for sustainability.

3.36. The past year has seen work to further integrate our services to support people during the pandemic. This has included support and discharge hubs to ensure people leave hospital safely, at the right time and with the right care. Our integrated senior management and operating model for community health and social care, established in 2019/20, were vital in enabling our pandemic response. We also adapted the governance of our local health partnership to better enable our local response; supporting the Local Outbreak Control Plan, test and trace, care home resilience and the vaccination programme.

3.37. Partners are conducting a review of how the partnership and planning can be developed and further integrated this year. Next steps will be taken in the context of existing shared priorities and the changes set out in the White Paper. Plans will also take account of immediate priorities, including the need to continue to collaboratively manage the pandemic, support our care market and the ongoing recovery of NHS services (see 3.2 - 3.5 above).

4. Public Health

4.1. The following sections outline key local and national policy and operational developments impacting current and future provision of public health services in East Sussex.

Ongoing local outbreak control and management

4.2. There are key areas of new or increased work in Public Health, brought by the coronavirus pandemic, which we expect to be required for the foreseeable future. These are:

4.3. *Testing* - supporting the establishment of symptomatic and asymptomatic testing services for the East Sussex population. Central government developed the testing policy in an organic way to limit the spread of COVID-19. Community testing infrastructure is in place. However, the mobile, local and regional testing sites infrastructure is all currently managed/commissioned by the DHSC. With testing rates becoming considerably lower and use of some sites low, it is unclear what, if any, changes may occur and what role/responsibility may fall to local authorities.

4.4. *Tracing* - Our Local Tracing Partnership (LTP) covers East and West Sussex County Councils and district and borough councils. The LTP has responsibility for 'tracing' individuals who have tested COVID-positive (defined as a 'case') which the National Tracing Team have failed to contact. The work involves advising traced individuals of their results, self-isolation requirements and offering additional support to self-isolate to prevent transmission of the virus. The DHSC and national NHS Test and Trace have recently invited local authorities to submit an expression of interest to take on duties from the national NHS test and trace system. Detailed information is not yet available about funding to support this function. The future role and responsibilities of LTPs within the new Public Health System (see 4.9 – 4.10 below) is also not yet clear.

4.5. *Vaccines* - Both a Sussex-wide board and an East Sussex-based working group have been set up with the aim of increasing vaccine uptake. Aims include ensuring easy access and using tailored communications to promote positive messaging to the key target groups.

4.6. *Infection Control* - Our Infection Control and Prevention (IPC) Advisors have provided targeted support and advice to managers at care homes with less than 70% vaccination uptake and more general vaccine Q&A sessions in residential care home settings. IPC Advisors assist homes that have had an outbreak and provide support and advice to help contain the outbreak. IPC Advisors also support staff with guidance and queries.

4.7. The East Sussex Local Outbreak Control Plan is a live document and will continue to be updated in line with national guidance. The Local Outbreak Control Plan has been reviewed by Public Health England (PHE) and DHSC and was considered to have met or fully met all of the required criteria. Lessons learned locally and more widely contribute to the knowledge base and are applied, ensuring that the plan is informed by best practice.

4.8. Public Health staff will continue to provide professional and clinical advice and guidance to support many frontline Council services, residents and councillors, and to interpret Government guidance. This work increases every time that national measures change, e.g. lockdown changes, and when new guidance emerges.

National public health reforms

4.9. The pandemic prompted a Government review of national public health institutions, which decided that the functions of PHE for health security/protection (including against infectious diseases) and health improvement would be split. The health protection capabilities of PHE and NHS Test and Trace will combine into a new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and its primary task will be to ensure the UK is well prepared for pandemics.

4.10. A new Office for Health Promotion will be created in the DHSC, under the professional leadership of the Chief Medical Officer. The Office for Health Promotion will help the whole health system focus on delivering greater action on prevention; and – working with a new cross-government ministerial board on prevention – it will drive and support the whole of Government to go further in improving health. Transitions of services are due to take place over the summer and by Autumn 2021

it is intended that the transfer of staff to new destinations will be complete, the UKHSA will be fully operational and the DHSC Office for Health Promotion will be established. ESCC Public Health will need to continue to work with these bodies on local COVID-19 outbreak management and health promotion so will monitor and adjust to their creation as required.

Weight management funding

4.11. Government has provided local authorities an additional grant to tackle obesity, which has been brought to the fore by evidence of the link to an increased risk from COVID-19. Public Health has invested the 2021/22 Adult Weight Management Services Grant (just under £250k) the Council received to increase capacity within our integrated health and wellbeing service, One You East Sussex. As well as offering more places in its weight management programmes, One You East Sussex is subcontracting some activity to other providers across East Sussex. This will ensure that people across the county are able to access weight management support in a wide range of areas and settings.

Reducing health inequalities

4.12. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on some groups has strengthened the strategic need to ensure public health programmes focus on addressing known health inequalities and their causes. Local authorities share responsibility for reducing health inequalities with health system partners by addressing priorities and outcomes in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and health and wellbeing strategies. Other system partners, including third sector organisations, play a role in reducing health inequalities. ESCC's approach includes working across our wider partnerships, including with our emerging Primary Care Networks, district and borough councils and VCSE partners, to develop a coordinated approach to supporting prevention and wellbeing and acting together on the causes of ill-health and health inequalities.

5. Children's Services

5.1. The following sections outline national policy developments expected to affect future provision of children's services.

Review of Children's Social Care

5.2. The Government has commissioned an independent review of Children's Social Care which is described as "a once in a generation opportunity to transform the children's social care system and provide children with loving, safe and stable families". The review, which is scheduled to report in summer 2022, will look at the whole system of support, safeguarding, protection and care, and the child's journey into and out of that system, including relevant aspects of preventative services provided as part of early help. ESCC will contribute to the review as its recommendations could have significant implications for the way we deliver children's social care services in future.

5.3. Alongside the review, the Government has asked the Competition and Markets Authority to review current market activity and the role of independent/private placement provision for children within it.

5.4. From September, it will also become illegal to place any child under 16 in a setting that is not registered by Ofsted. Although this is a response to concerns about the quality of both the settings and the degree of oversight of children within them, it is likely to increase the difficulty in finding appropriate and legal options for children with very challenging and complex needs that registered providers are unwilling to accept. Furthermore, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a consultation on 24 May seeking views on proposed standards for unregulated provision for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17.

Family Hubs

5.5. In March 2021, the Government published the Leadsom Review into early years services called “The best start for life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days.” The report stressed the importance of children having the best possible support as early as possible and the important role of staff such as health visitors and communication workers.

5.6. The review also links to a revised Government plan for the development of family hubs. Returning to an earlier children centre/Sure Start model, this would see services such as maternity, health visiting and benefits advice co-located and easily accessible to families; and help targeted at a lower level of need. In East Sussex we have undertaken a gap analysis against the principles of the new Family Hub model and the Early Help 0-19 service can meet some of the requirements but additional resources and further development in some areas would be needed to fully meet them all.

Supporting Families Programme

5.7. Supporting Families (previously called Troubled Families) is the national programme for the delivery of whole family support. Led by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) the programme encourages local authorities to take a ‘whole family, whole system’ approach and promotes the use of data in planning and delivery of services to families. In East Sussex it is known as ‘Family Focus’ and keywork support is provided through our Early Help 0-19 Service. We have a target of 602 families for 2021/22. This is a minimum expectation of the number of families who will achieve their goals, making positive progress and enabling the Council to make payment by results claims.

5.8. Through the Children & Young People’s Trust (CYPT) we work with partners to promote our whole system, whole family approach, share workforce development opportunities and identify external funding streams to sustain family support programmes. Building on a series of workshops delivered during summer 2020, we are hosting a further round of workshops this summer to engage with partners across the multi-agency workforce about our shared experiences of supporting families and to develop our whole system, whole family work.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme

5.9. In June, Kent County Council declared it could no longer safely accept new Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) into its care. In response, the Government proposed changes to the National Transfer Scheme to encourage more authorities to accept transfers of UASC. These changes included increased funding and support for local authorities that accept UASC. Although we are not seeing the

same volume of UASC presenting in East Sussex as in Kent, we have seen an increase and are currently supporting 117 young people. This includes 53 under 18s and those over 18 who still require support from the County Council.

5.10. The National Transfer system is not a new process and East Sussex has played an active role in taking responsibility for UASC via this route since its inception in 2018 and will continue to do so when we have suitable placements available. Unless the Government mandate all local authorities to join a rota, East Sussex would not propose to volunteer to take part in the new voluntary rota that is being proposed since it will limit the flexibility that ESCC currently has to manage the transfer process effectively.

6. Education and Special Educational Needs and Disability

6.1. The following sections cover local and national developments impacting provision of education, education support and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services in East Sussex.

Pupil progress and achievement

6.2. Throughout the last year the Council has worked closely with schools, through the Primary and Secondary Boards, to support pupils with their learning. This has included a focus on standards and support to keep schools open for vulnerable and keyworker pupils during lockdowns. In addition, the Council has put in place a range of initiatives to support children and young people's education recovery.

6.3. The Primary Board allocated funding to develop reading and ensure that all pupils continue to make good progress. Leadership development was supported through the 'Stepping into Leadership' training and subject leader networks were developed across the curriculum. Since the start of this academic year (2020/21), members of the Secondary Board and the headteachers in their area groups have continued to collaborate closely on pupils' progress and achievement through high quality teaching, recognising and supporting students' individual needs, and engagement with 'hard to reach' families. The Secondary Board provided additional resource for targeted work with disadvantaged pupils and is working with Public Health to reduce persistent absence.

6.4. The Primary and Secondary Boards are also working together to support schools with the transition for Year 6 pupils into Year 7. There has also been close liaison between schools, colleges and the Youth Employability Service (YES) to support the transition of Year 11 students into Post-16 provision. Local authority advisers continue to work with school leaders to support their planning for educational recovery. A coaching programme and training have been put in place for primary and secondary leaders to support their wellbeing and resilience.

6.5. The Council will continue to work closely with the Primary and Secondary Boards to ensure that schools are able to access appropriate funds or resources which relate to the national school catch-up plan. The Government has committed to offering courses of free tuition for disadvantaged students and to an expansion of the 16-19 tuition fund, targeting key subjects such as maths and English. Other elements of the catch-up plan remain unclear and the boards will play a vital role in assessing

the impact and effectiveness of new initiatives within the context of our own local arrangements for educational recovery.

Increase in Electively Home Educated children and young people

6.6. The Council supports families who choose to electively home educate (EHE) their child with information, guidance and signposting. The EHE team ascertains the suitability of home education on an annual basis, to ensure that every child is receiving their educational entitlement. The EHE team also provides support where a family wants their child to attend school but feels they have to make the decision to EHE due to concerns about their child's provision at school.

6.7. The number of EHE children in East Sussex remains high at 1278. At the end of April 2021, the EHE team was working with an additional 279 children where the family had indicated a desire to electively home educate but the child was still on the roll of a school. This has now reduced to around 50 due to the team being increased by four EHE officers in recognition of the historic year-on-year rise in EHE numbers and the significant additional pressure related to COVID-19. The team works collaboratively with other Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services and Children's Social Care to return children to school where EHE is deemed unsuitable, and to maintain school placements where families express a desire to EHE due to concerns about provision. We continue to closely monitor EHE numbers and EHE is on the agenda of several strategic forums including the East Sussex Safer Children's Partnership.

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

6.8. As COVID-19 restrictions are eased, it is anticipated that the increased need for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (MHEW) support for schools and families will continue due to the long-term effects of stress and anxiety on wellbeing. Services are increasing their capacity to respond to MHEW needs with the provision of additional training for school and college staff and governors, funded by the Department for Education with a grant of £67k for East Sussex. An additional MHEW Schools Advisor has been appointed.

6.9. Consultation with stakeholders suggested that as well as training, schools and colleges need resources and activities to support emotional wellbeing. A series of toolkits are being developed; the first two will be launched at the MHEW schools conference in June and July. Topics include anxiety, self-harm and emotionally based school avoidance.

6.10. An externally commissioned schools' supervision programme will enhance the understanding of, need for and capacity of schools and colleges to provide supervision for members of staff. In addition, regular networking opportunities continue to be provided for senior leaders and governors to maintain their own wellbeing and further develop their skills in responding to the MHEW needs of children and young people, staff and parents/carers.

Funding to expand Mental Health Support Teams

6.11. Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) act on evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental health issues in schools. The teams' interventions complement the other support already on offer and support schools to develop a

whole school approach to supporting mental health. East Sussex already has three teams in the Havens, South Downs and Bexhill & Rother, covering 45 schools.

6.12. The MHST service received 272 referrals in the six months between November 2020 and April 2021, contacting 1,302 children and young people. A groupwork programme offer has been developed for schools that will provide psychoeducation to children, parents and school staff on a range of mental health issues including anxiety and depression alongside intervention groups for children. The team has a Specialist SEND practitioner in post who is working in three special schools offering an adapted cognitive behavioural therapy approach to the young people to support their mental health.

6.13. East Sussex has been awarded 2.25 new teams by NHS England. Team 1 for Hastings will be operational by September 2021, team 2 for Hastings from September 2022 and the 0.25 team by September 2023. Location of this team is still to be decided.

Consultation on the High Needs Funding Formula

6.14. This spring, the Government consulted on making changes to the funding formula for the allocation of the High Needs Block (the funding that local authorities use to make educational provision for children with SEND) at a national level. If implemented, these changes would see a significant shift in the way the grant is calculated for individual local authorities by incorporating the actual High Needs expenditure for the 2017/18 financial year into the allocation calculation for 2022/23. As East Sussex has effectively managed expenditure on the High Needs budget within the envelope of funding allocated since 2017/18, this change would result in a reduction of funding by over £900k (or 4%). East Sussex Schools' Forum has raised concerns with local MPs as well as through the national consultation on the proposals. At the time of writing we await the final decision on the 2022/23 grant allocation.

Government policy on academisation

6.15. The Education Secretary has, this year, set out a renewed commitment for schools to become academies and join multi-academy trusts. The Council continues to work with schools to support them to explore formal partnerships, including joining a multi-academy trust where appropriate. During the 2020/21 academic year two schools joined a multi-academy trust, and a further four schools have successfully applied for academy orders.

Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools

6.16. The "Everyone's Invited" national campaign, launched in June 2020, has highlighted the issues of peer on peer harmful sexual behaviour in schools and colleges. In April, following increased national focus on the campaign, the Government announced that Ofsted would undertake a rapid review to determine whether schools and colleges have appropriate safeguarding processes in place. The review was published in June.

6.17. ESCC will consider with schools the findings of the review for any learning to inform our established approach. The Standard and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) and key partners, such as SWIFT Specialist Family Services and ISEND,

have worked together over recent years to develop an East Sussex protocol and toolkit for schools and colleges in managing these complex situations. The protocol includes a local authority based rapid response team which aims to offer timely support and guidance to school leaders when a situation emerges which threatens the smooth running of a school and creates vulnerabilities within the community. In addition, SLES has commissioned SWIFT Specialist Family Services to deliver a Sexual Risk Leads Training programme throughout this academic year (2020/21). This specialist training programme is designed for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in schools so that they can better support children and young people involved in peer on peer harmful sexual behaviour, as well as respond to disclosures of child sexual abuse. To date, 40 DSLs have attended. The protocol and toolkit are fundamental elements of DSL and Whole School Safeguarding Training.

SEND Review and SEND inspection framework

6.18. A DfE review of the impact of SEND reforms introduced in 2014 is due to be published this summer to identify areas for improvement. The review was due to report last year but has been delayed due to COVID-19. The Council has contributed to the review through the consultation process. Any recommendations will be incorporated into local policy and practice.

6.19. Since 2016, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have been undertaking Joint Area Inspections of SEND across each local authority area. The inspection covers, education, health, and care for children with SEND in England. Although a precise timeline has not been published, these are due to conclude this year, with a new inspection framework expected from 2022 onwards.

6.20. This framework will very likely be informed by the outcomes of the SEND review and learning from the outcomes of previous inspections which found a large number of local areas as having significant failings. East Sussex was last inspected in December 2016. The outcome of this was that we had no significant areas of concern. The recommendations for improvement were incorporated into our SEND Strategy. We will publish an updated SEND Strategy this year which will build on the progress we have made since 2016 as well as our plans for addressing gaps identified through the latest Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

7. Communities

7.1. The following sections outline current and anticipated changes, locally and nationally, expected to impact and inform provision of services we deliver to communities in future.

Implementing the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

7.2. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which became law in April, covers all victims/survivors of domestic abuse regardless of their legally protected characteristics, while also stating that any guidance issued under the act must, so far as relevant, take account of the fact that the majority of victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales are female (excluding children treated as victims themselves). It sets out a definition in law of what constitutes domestic abuse, recognising that it can take the form of one or many of: physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse and/or psychological, emotional or other abuse, carried out by a person who is personally connected to the victim.

7.3. The act places a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within refuges and other forms of safe accommodation. This has been accompanied by Government funding of £1.07m for ESCC for the financial year 2021/22. The act also places a duty on each such authority to appoint a multi-agency domestic abuse Local Partnership Board. The Council intends to extend the remit of the Pan-Sussex Domestic Abuse Improvement and Multi-Agency Group into the new Local Partnership Board which will oversee the work to assess the need for refuges within each local authority area; develop and publish a strategy for the provision of this support (due in August 2021); and then monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

7.4. There is partnership working taking place between East and West Sussex County Councils to agree collective priorities and to jointly procure support in safe accommodation. This will ensure the needs of women and children, and the needs of underserved communities, are met as well as other requirements in the act that will impact on Council-provided and commissioned services (for example Child Contact Centres).

Violence Against Women and Girls

7.5. The Home Office is seeking views to help inform the development of the Government's next Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. The consultation collates people's experiences and the expertise of relevant professionals, including staff working in social care, education, local government, public health and healthcare. Once the strategy is published, ESCC will devise a local response to implement improvements in the effort to provide interventions to address perpetrator behaviour and ensure that the Council and workforce is equipped to respond to the changing nature of these crimes and, most importantly, to support victims, survivors and their children.

7.6. ESCC is working toward [White Ribbon reaccreditation](#) (provided by the White Ribbon charity who lead in engaging with men and boys to end violence against women) to support men to take responsibility for reducing the level of violence against women by raising awareness and understanding.

Tackling drug misuse in Hastings

7.7. Hastings has been identified as one of four pilot areas across the country for a joint Home Office, DHSC and Public Health England initiative taking an intensive approach to tackling drug misuse in selected locations most affected, alongside national activity to disrupt the supply of drugs. The project aims to build on existing work and partnerships to improve health and reduce crime.

7.8. Hastings was selected due to high rates of heroin and crack cocaine use alongside high rates of drug-related deaths. Funding for the scheme commenced in the last financial year 2020/21 and will run until the end of the financial year 2022/23 and will see an investment of £5m in the town. The project is creating a whole system approach to tackling heroin and crack cocaine use by focussing on outcomes relating to police enforcement, diversion away from the criminal justice systems and treatment and recovery interventions.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

7.9. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill has reached the Committee Stage in the House of Commons. Elements of the bill which will affect local authorities and Safer Communities Partnership working include a duty on local authorities, the police, criminal justice agencies, health and fire and rescue services to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence; and the introduction of Offensive Weapon Homicide Reviews and Serious Violence Reduction Orders. These will be used to prevent serious violence by equipping the police with new powers to stop and search those convicted of knife and offensive weapons offences. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will place new duties on local authorities to tackle serious violence within a holistic public health approach. There is a partnership structure in place for tackling the issues raised and the Council is committed to implementing the guidance in respect of the new duty once it has been received.

7.10. It will also be important for this bill to complement the measures outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act (see 7.2 – 7.4 above), the forthcoming VAWG Strategy (see 7.5 – 7.6), the draft Victims Bill, as well as wider legislation and guidance, to ensure that simultaneous changes to the local government community safety landscape are considered collectively and carefully.

Library and Information Service

7.11. The Library and Information Service has maintained provision of services wherever possible in the pandemic and worked to ensure that the service continues to deliver on our priorities: improving child and adult literacy, supporting the economy, health and well-being and supporting those that are digitally excluded.

7.12. It is anticipated that the easing of lockdown could result in a surge in demand for some services and the library service is well placed to support with recovery. Early evidence suggests support will be needed in helping parents and children with educational catch up through homework clubs, supporting those that have found themselves socially isolated and helping people find new jobs. Key to the success of our offers and contribution to the recovery process will be ensuring that we market our services to those in need, using a variety of channels.

Trading Standards

7.13. Trading Standards, Sussex Police and the district and borough Environmental Health teams have worked closely together during the pandemic. A single point of contact has been established to enable queries and concerns about compliance from businesses and residents to be managed effectively, which will be continued.

7.14. As outlined above (see 2.14), Trading Standards are preparing for post-Brexit changes to border operations at Newhaven Port. Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils are designated the Port Health Authority (PHA) for Newhaven and have been working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the port and Trading Standards to recognise Newhaven Port as a Border Control Point to allow for the continued importation of high-risk food. Trading Standards is in liaison with the Port and UK Border Force to ensure adequate facilities are in place for product safety and feed imports.

7.15. Trading Standards will develop and implement a risk-based approach to inspection and monitoring. In addition, the team will liaise with Government agencies to co-ordinate our activities, both at Newhaven and elsewhere, as part of our market surveillance activities. We will also educate and support businesses and consumers in East Sussex to know about the changing regulatory framework and requirements brought about by exit from the EU.

Resilience and Emergency Planning

7.16. The Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF) (a partnership formed of organisations with a responsibility to prepare for and respond to any major emergency within East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove) continues to provide a coordination and communications role in supporting the multi-agency response to the pandemic. The nature of the pandemic means we are likely to move in and out of response and recovery throughout 2021 while continuing our efforts to return to business as usual. The SRF will have a light touch coordination and communication role in the recovery phase. The recovery phase will be local authority led and will focus on local recovery in the three parts of Sussex, rather than the whole. Where there is a role for a pan-Sussex response, this will be co-ordinated by a Recovery Coordinating Group.

7.17. The ESCC Emergency Planning and Resilience team has undertaken a review of key tasks delayed by the pandemic and gaps in delivery have been addressed to support future delivery of the service post-pandemic.

Planning reforms

7.18. As announced in the Queens Speech in May, the Government is committed to reforming the planning system over the coming 12 months, and most likely beyond. These reforms are expected to be along the lines of the proposals set out in the Planning for the Future White Paper, which was published in September 2020. Such reforms are likely to significantly affect the County Council.

7.19. This impact will be in terms of how the County Planning Authority function (primarily dealing with waste and minerals planning matters) is undertaken, how the County Council secures the timely provision of infrastructure necessary to support new development (particularly education and transport), and how the Council performs its statutory planning consultee roles both for planning applications and Local Plans. Ensuring that the teams that perform these functions are able to respond to these changes and best represent the County Council's interests in planning decisions will be a key issue over the coming months.

8. Highways and Transport

8.1. The following sections cover local developments and new national policies and strategies that will impact the future provision and priorities of highways, transport services and transport infrastructure in East Sussex.

Highways contract re-procurement

8.2. The current highway maintenance contract is a seven-year contract awarded to Costain in April 2016. The contract does not allow for any extensions, by design, and therefore a new contract will need to be in place before the end of April 2023. A project team has been established, reporting to the Highway Re-procurement Board

and a Scrutiny Reference Group has been established from Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee to provide oversight and scrutiny of the project.

8.3. The project team is working to the Corporate Strategic Commissioning template and has completed the Outline Business Case (OBC), which was approved by Cabinet in January. The OBC is a high-level options appraisal that looked at a range of possible service delivery models through which the Council could deliver its future highways maintenance service beyond April 2023. It assessed the relative advantages, disadvantages and risks of different service delivery models. A long list of options was appraised, to inform the determination of a short list (two options) for consideration and further detailed development within the Detailed Business Case (DBC) stage to be presented to Cabinet in July.

8.4. Engagement of elected Members has been key to the success of this project, and a cross party Scrutiny Reference Group was established to input into the project. The Reference Group has held ten meetings and three briefing sessions to date, which have included an overview of the current contract, contract form, and business case development. The Reference Group signalled their approval of the options appraisal long list to shortlist and identified key priorities to be included in the DBC in their interim report. Scrutiny involvement will continue through the next stages of the project via a re-established Reference Group drawn from the new Place Scrutiny Committee membership.

Bus Back Better

8.5. In March 2021, the Government launched Bus Back Better, a new bus strategy for England outside London. It aims to rejuvenate local bus services, making them attractive for passengers, cheaper, easier to understand and use, faster, more reliable, and greener. It acknowledges the decades-long decline in bus patronage nationally and points to towns and cities which have bucked the trend, increasing passenger numbers with coordinated services and investment. Greater use of bus travel and more buses being zero emission will contribute to Government's central policy objectives of carbon net zero and levelling up. Central to the National Bus Strategy are new requirements for Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to have a much stronger role in specifying and organising local bus services.

8.6. LTAs are expected to use the powers available in the Bus Services Act 2017 to achieve the aims of the strategy. Two potential routes are available – the development of a statutory Enhanced Partnership (EP) between LTAs and bus operators, or a franchising scheme. By the end of June 2021, Government expects all LTAs to commit to establishing an EP across their entire areas and for all operators to be in co-operation with the process. The EP, or a decision to progress with a franchising scheme should then be in place by April 2022. Government made available a £100k flat payment to assist local authorities, who request it, towards progressing an EP or franchising arrangement. We received this capacity funding in April. Further capacity funding will be available from the end of June once Government has received the notices of intent.

8.7. The strategy also places new requirements on LTAs to develop Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) by the end of October. This is to be updated annually and reflected in the Local Transport Plan and in other relevant local plans such as

local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plans (more details on both below). The requirement to set up BSIPs and EPs with local bus operators, is to tight timescales, with actions on networks and services, fares and ticketing, passenger facilities, and highway bus priority measures. The strategy states that if a local authority fails to take this forward, they will lose out on their share of the £3bn of funding announced. They will also lose their current allocation of bus service operators grant (ESCC receives £426K pa), as well as expected revenue grants to support operators in maintaining services whilst passenger numbers recover post-COVID-19.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

8.8. In response to the Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Plan and the more recent 'Gear Change' strategy, we have developed, with key local partners, a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). This sets out proposed local cycling and walking networks for the key coastal towns and the market towns within the county. It provides a basis for local authorities and their key partners to seek funding for cycling and walking infrastructure projects. The LCWIP will be considered by Cabinet in September 2021.

8.9. While we will work with our partners to explore and secure funding from various sources, one of the new main sources of funding will be the Department for Transport's (DfT) 'Capability Fund'. This Government funding is part of the £5bn available to local authorities over the next four years to provide greater access to buses and cycling and walking infrastructure.

Transport for the South East

8.10. Transport for the South East (TfSE) was established in 2017 by ESCC and partners, as a partnership to speak with one voice on the South East region's transport needs and priorities (see more information at - [Home - Transport for the South East](#)). TfSE's thirty-year Transport Strategy was submitted to Government in summer 2020, along with a proposal for TfSE to be granted statutory status as a sub-national transport body. While Government decided not to progress the proposal, DfT ministers have instructed officials to have regard to the strategy in developing new policy for the region.

8.11. Following confirmation of DfT funding for 2021-22, TfSE's main focus this year is on completing its programme of geographic and thematic studies. These will inform the development of a strategic investment plan for the region which will be published for public consultation in summer 2022. It will set out an integrated, long-term investment pipeline designed to deliver the vision at the heart of TfSE's Transport Strategy.

Williams-Shapps Review of Rail

8.12. The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, published by Government in May 2021, is intended to transform the railway, making it more efficient and responsive to the modern environment, catering to the needs of passengers and the freight industry. The plan will bring the network under a single leadership with the creation of a new public body called 'Great British Railways' which will run and plan the network, own the rail infrastructure, procure passenger services, and set and collect most fares and timetables. In addition, private partners will be contracted to operate trains, with franchising being replaced by Passenger Service Contracts; fares and tickets will be

simplified, including standardising mobile and online ticketing and flexible season tickets, and there will be better integration of rail with buses and cycling, as well as other forms of transport.

8.13. These changes will have a significant impact on passengers, businesses and the freight industry and it is important that as an authority we are involved in future processes associated with the plan to ensure these changes benefit our residents, those visiting East Sussex, and businesses operating in and out of the county.

Transport Decarbonisation Plan

8.14. Government is expected to publish its Transport Decarbonisation Plan this year which will set out the policies and plans needed to tackle transport related emissions with a vision for how a net zero transport system will benefit us all.

8.15. The Decarbonisation Plan will influence our own transport policies and plans for the county through the update to the East Sussex Local Transport Plan (see 8.16 below). To tackle transport related emissions, we will need to consider how we can use our cars less and ensure active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport become the preferred choice for our daily activities. Our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (see 8.8 – 8.9 above) and the requirement for the County Council to enter into an Enhanced Bus Partnership as well as develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (see 8.5 – 8.7 above) will support this. Working with partners, we will need to consider our role and the potential approach to delivering electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the county as well as engage with bus operators on greening their fleet.

Local Transport Plan refresh

8.16. The East Sussex Local Transport Plan sets out our strategy and policies for how we plan to invest in improving transport and maintaining the roads in the county to meet transport needs. While our current Local Transport Plan covers 2011 to 2026, we plan to refresh it to reflect the national, regional and local policy changes of recent years that will influence how we plan and deliver transport in East Sussex in the future. This includes the County Council's declaration of a climate emergency, along with many of the developments referred in this section above (paragraphs 8.5 - 8.15). We will set out over the coming year how we plan to engage with stakeholders to help inform the update to the Plan.

High Speed Rail 1 (HS1) extension

8.17. Network Rail has recently completed their Kent and East Sussex Rail Connectivity study. Funded by DfT and the County Council, the study has considered four options to potentially improve rail connectivity to the Kent and East Sussex coast. Two of these options are in East Sussex; the first with partial line speed improvements on the Marshlink and the use of bi-mode (diesel or battery) trains, whilst the second involves further line speed improvements and the electrification of Marshlink. Both options include a new platform between platforms 2 and 3 at Ashford International and the track reconfiguration to enable trains to run between the HS1 link and Marshlink.

8.18. The study has informed the development of a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) which sets out the strategic case for each option; the estimated costs;

an economic analysis of the benefits of each option relative to its cost, and recommendations on which options should be taken to the next development stage. The SOBC was submitted to Government in May 2021 for their consideration. It will be for Government to direct which options in the SOBC, if any, should be taken forward.

Highways England Programmes - A27 and A21

8.19. In 2020, Government published its second Roads Investment Strategy (RIS2), covering the period 2020 – 2025. RIS2 identifies that further work will be undertaken on developing proposals for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate as a potential pipeline scheme for construction between 2025 and 2030. This further work will be managed by Highways England and will commence this year. Alongside our partners, the County Council will continue to engage with Highways England on making the case for investment in a more comprehensive solution for this section of the strategic road network to improve the economic connectivity of the county.

8.20. RIS2 also included the development of a package of road safety improvements for the A21 corridor north of Hastings. Highways England commenced work on their safety package study in early 2021 and the measures will be rolled out over the life of RIS2. While not included in the RIS, we will continue to lobby and make the case to Government for improvements to the Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst, Flimwell and Hurst Green sections of the A21.

9. Economy

9.1. The following sections outline local developments and national policy and investment programmes that will affect the support we provide, with partners, to drive sustainable local economic growth and recovery.

9.2. The impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on East Sussex businesses continue to be felt. Financial and other support is being provided by Government however the long-term impacts of the pandemic on our national and local economy will continue for some time to come. Business East Sussex (BES) (the East Sussex Growth Hub and part of the ESCC Economic Development Team – see more information here: [Home - Business East Sussex](#)) continues to identify priorities to support businesses to emerge stronger and more robust than before the pandemic and as the country transitions from our membership of the EU. The Economic Development team continues to invest in businesses by offering grants and loans, whilst commissioning a range of specialist support programmes aimed at helping businesses “pivot”, thrive and grow for the coming years.

9.3. Since its publication last summer, great strides have been made in delivering the Team East Sussex [Economy Recovery Plan](#) and helping businesses, people and communities recover from COVID-19. Between September 2020 and March 2021, £87.85m has been secured for investment in East Sussex. This is a combination of £53.47m of new money and a further £34.38m already secured that has been realigned to support business survival, reset and recovery.

UK Community Renewal and Shared Prosperity Funds

9.4. In March, at the Government’s Spring Budget, the prospectus for the pilot £220m UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF) was launched for the period April

2021 to March 2022. The UKCRF is a precursor to the much larger multi-annual UK Shared Prosperity Fund, planned to replace EU structural and development funding from April 2022, which will see the Government investing £1.5bn per year.

9.5. The purpose of this, mainly (90%) revenue funded, pilot is to seek innovative projects that can respond to the four investment themes of employment support, skills, business support and community/place shaping. Upper tier authorities are responsible for administering the fund, which involved co-ordinating the bidding process, appraising applications from stakeholders and then approving the submission list to Government by June 2021. ESCC received over 30 applications and prioritised 11 projects to the value of £5m. The outcomes of the County Council's submission will be known in July and successful projects must deliver by March 2022, with the upper tier authorities responsible for overseeing the programme management.

Levelling Up Fund

9.6. Government announced its £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund (LUF) earlier this year, which will provide funding to invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities. The fund covers the period April 2021 to March 2024 (with some schemes funded up to March 2025 in exceptional circumstances) and is for bids of up to £20m capital funding (or more by exception). The LUF addresses the three investment themes of transport, regeneration and town centre, and cultural.

9.7. Each upper tier authority has the right to submit one bid on transport investment throughout the lifetime of the LUF programme. As such, the County Council has submitted a transport bid for funding to deliver the replacement of Exceat Bridge on the A259 near Seaford, which links two of our growth areas, Eastbourne and Newhaven, which are also within the highest priority areas for the LUF.

9.8. In addition, borough and district councils can put forward bids across all three investment themes but will need the support of the local transport authority for any bid that contain transport investments. All our East Sussex Borough and District Councils considered bid submissions for projects or packages in their respective areas around the three investment themes. All bids were submitted to Government in June with decisions expected this autumn. Further Levelling Up Fund bidding rounds are expected to follow in subsequent years but the timeframe for delivery will still be the same.

Local Enterprise Partnership Review

9.9. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were introduced as a more locally-driven replacement for the nine regional development agencies abolished in 2010. The 38 LEPs are partnerships between councils, businesses and other stakeholders, driving productivity and job creation led by a business chair and board members who are leaders of local businesses and public bodies.

9.10. The Budget 2021 signalled change, with the Government undertaking to evolve the form and function of LEPs as they determine how best to support recovery, productivity, growth and business resilience. More detailed plans will be announced ahead of the summer Parliamentary recess, with a new operating model

to be at least partly in place by April 2022. The South East LEP, which covers East Sussex, Kent, Essex, Medway, Southend and Thurrock, is anticipating significant change as it moves to establish a refreshed focus without a capital programme to underpin it.

Skills

9.11. The Skills East Sussex (SES) Board and its wider stakeholders have continued to deliver a range of programmes to support people into work and training in response to the impact of the pandemic on the local workforce, including:

- Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPS) led by our local training providers are proving an effective tool for supporting those aged 18-25 into apprenticeships;
- the Department for Work and Pensions Kickstart programme has started to see young people moving into paid 6-month work placements in the county; and
- in July, Reed in Partnership, will start to deliver the Government funded - Restart programme, to address the needs of the long-term unemployed.

The SES Board is currently exploring new training and work opportunities that will be afforded by the move to net zero.

9.12. The Government has issued a new White Paper (Skills for Jobs) and the Post-16 Education Bill was presented to Parliament in May. The White paper aims to bridge current skill gaps by providing a Lifetime Skills Guarantee, placing employers in a more central role within the education system and investing in higher-level technical qualifications and apprenticeships. The paper presents a range of opportunities for East Sussex, including scope for the development of modular learning (where individuals access multiple modules of study, rather than taking a full degree or technical qualification in one go, providing greater flexibility in learning), lifelong learning grants for all adults to undertake technical or academic learning pathways, support with teacher recruitment and capital investment in Further Education facilities to improve the range and quality of local provision.

Gatwick and Newhaven Ports

9.13. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international travel resulted in a significant decline in the number of passengers flying into and out of Gatwick during 2020 and the early part of 2021. This had knock-on impacts within the airport itself, with airlines shifting their operations elsewhere and job losses within the industry, but also within the wider business community and supply chains that serve the airport. With the gradual easing of the lockdown during 2021, it is expected that passenger numbers will start to grow but it may be some years before the number of flights out of the airport and consequently passenger numbers return to pre-COVID levels.

9.14. Due to the pandemic, Gatwick paused its plans to seek permission to utilise their northern runway for smaller aircrafts. Gatwick has recently recommenced work on these proposals, as a means of increasing the airport's capacity in the future to accommodate additional flights and passengers. We remain supportive of the expansion of Gatwick, and the potential economic benefits that this would bring to East Sussex, but on the proviso that the environment and social impacts, particularly air quality and noise, on the health and wellbeing of our local communities are

appropriately mitigated. New and emerging technology means benefits such as quieter fleets will help to reduce the impact of noise on local communities.

9.15. Newhaven and its port remains an important international gateway into the county. In December 2020, £6.2m of Government funding was secured from the Port Infrastructure Fund to build new border infrastructure at Newhaven Port for handling new customs and trading processes after Brexit. Part of the funding is being used to fund the final road infrastructure connection from the Port Access Road into the port land, to open up viable commercial space and maximise the benefits of the road. In addition, the Newhaven to Dieppe ferry was one of nine routes serving eight ports in the country to receive a Government freight contract aimed at increasing the country's import and export capacity after the EU transition. A third daily freight-only crossing started in early 2021 and this funding has secured the route's future.

Cultural sector recovery

9.16. Cultural and heritage destinations, visitor attractions and hospitality contribute to the East Sussex economy and support local health and wellbeing. These sectors were significantly affected by national restrictions in response to COVID-19. National bodies, such as Historic England and Arts Council England, are campaigning for continued financial support, with the £1.57bn Cultural Recovery Fund being the most significant form of financial support, which has seen two rounds of grants awarded so far (£5.4m to East Sussex). In June, the Government published its Tourism Recovery Plan to support a growing, dynamic, sustainable and world-leading tourism sector in all parts of the UK. The plan aims to recover domestic overnight trip volume and spend to 2019 levels by the end of 2022, and inbound visitor numbers and spend by the end of 2023.

9.17. Local tailored support has been developed, including South East Creatives business support and grants for Creative, Cultural and Digital companies, and SELEP investment in tourism recovery programmes. A pan-Sussex Culture and Tourism Recovery Group has been established which is looking to the future and planning for shared research and fundraising to support destination management organisations marketing campaigns. The group's work will be informed by the Government's national recovery plan. The SELEP Creative Workspace programme continues to respond to the need to re-purpose our high streets and address changes in work patterns.

Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill

9.18. The Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech 2021, is intended to accelerate and improve the deployment and use of digital communications networks. The Bill will support the installation, maintenance, upgrading and sharing of apparatus that enables better telecommunications coverage and connectivity. It will deliver reforms to the Electronic Communications Code to support faster and more collaborative negotiations for the use of private and public land for telecommunications deployment and put the right framework in place for the use of installed apparatus. We will monitor progress of the bill and potential impacts on ESCC's work to improve local digital connectivity.

10. Climate Change and Environment

10.1. The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and set a target of achieving carbon neutrality from its activities as soon as possible and in any event by 2050. This is in line with the updated target for the UK agreed by Parliament in 2019. The severity of the climate crisis requires a shift in approach and now sees climate change initiatives as a part of everyday life. This has meant that work to tackle climate change and carbon emissions has become even more a part of ESCC's core business and we will see investment in carbon reduction increasingly as a basic need and key priority for the Council. As such, delivering net zero is a priority consideration in areas of work outlined throughout this appendix, including on transport planning (see section 8 above) and our review of how we work post-pandemic (see section 11 below).

10.2. The following sections outline local plans and partnerships; and national developments informing ESCC's response to climate change and environmental protection:

United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP) 26

10.3. The UK will host the COP26 summit in Glasgow in November, the UN's climate change conference. The UK Government is undertaking work with other UN nations to reach an agreement on how to tackle climate change. We expect Government funds and initiatives to be launched in the run-up to the conference, which may present opportunities for ESCC. The Government has also committed to publish its comprehensive net zero strategy on how it will meet the national net zero target in advance of the conference. Any agreement reached at the conference to tackling climate change in the next decade will inform the national approach to delivering net zero and some of ESCC's future plans.

ESCC net zero response

10.4. ESCC is a member of a partnership of private, public and educational sector organisations that make up the Environment East Sussex Board, which has prepared and is now implementing the East Sussex Environment Strategy 2020 (see more information here: [Environment Strategy 2020 – East Sussex County Council](#)). Progress against the aims and actions set out in the strategy will be monitored and reported over the course of the next year. Many of the aims and actions involve multi-agency/organisational responses and areas of work. Some of these actions complement other areas of work that the County Council is undertaking, in particular the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Of particular note for the coming year will be the development of a road map to net zero for the county.

10.5. ESCC's corporate [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#) was published in June 2020. This covers a two year period and a progress report is due to be prepared in September. Through the action plan, the County Council will be implementing measures that look to cut emissions from our buildings, transport and procurement, as well as investing in generating more renewable energy.

10.6. The Council will also be promoting and delivering support programmes that help residents and businesses identify and implement actions for reducing their carbon emissions. This will include programmes such as the Warm Home Service (more information available here: <https://warmeastsussex.org.uk>), Sussex Solar Together (more information available here: solartogether.co.uk) and Low Carbon

across the South East (LoCASE) (more information available here: [Low Carbon Across the South East](#)).

Climate Change adaptation

10.7. The Council, particularly through its Lead Local Flood Authority role, also has a role to play when it comes to adapting to the impacts of climate change. Projects that are underway, which the County Council is leading on, include the Seaford Property Level Resilience Project (working with homeowners to make adaptations to their properties, so that they are more resilient when flooding does occur) and the Southern Wealden and Eastbourne Dynamic Flood Risk Management project, which is a project that will run for the next 5-6 years and aim to improve knowledge and understanding of flood risk in this area so that better plans and interventions can be prepared that reduce homes' and businesses' vulnerability to flooding.

Environment Bill

10.8. In the 2021 Queen's Speech, the Government re-introduced its flagship Environment Bill to be progressed over the coming year, with any necessary secondary legislation following thereafter. The bill was previously introduced in the last Parliament and is planned to:

- Put the environment at the centre of policy making, making sure that this Government – and those in the future – are held accountable for making progress on environmental issues.
- Introduce a framework for legally-binding environmental targets and establish a new, independent Office for Environmental Protection.
- Introduce measures to revolutionise how we recycle; enhance local powers to tackle sources of air pollution; secure long-term, resilient water supplies and wastewater services; and protect nature and improve biodiversity.

10.9. Although amendments are expected to the bill as it progresses through Parliament, it is clear that many aspects of the bill will affect County Council functions. Proposals for changes to recycling have been consulted on and we await the outcome of the DERFA consultations on a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, extended producer responsibility and consistency in household and business recycling. We will work with colleagues in the borough and district councils to fully understand the impact on both the collection authorities and ESCC as the waste disposal authority.

10.10. Similarly, proposals around trebling tree planting by the end of this Parliament will have implications for the County Council as a landowner. The bill also currently proposes the need for biodiversity net gain to be mandated in any planning decisions taken, as well as the establishment of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Although such reforms will complement parts of the East Sussex Environment Strategy (see 10.4 above), there are clearly resourcing implications for this. There is still some uncertainty as to how the burden will be split between lower and upper tier authorities, although ESCC, particularly through our position on the Local Nature Partnership, is maintaining a dialogue with DERFA to establish the practicalities for how such reforms will be addressed and appropriately resourced. It is anticipated that further clarity on addressing and progressing these reforms will be forthcoming over the next few months.

10.11. The Bill will also create a duty on ministers to have due regard to five environmental principles (the policy statement on environmental principles) when making Government policy in future. The Government consulted on the principles between March and June, which are:

- The integration principle which states that policy-makers should look for opportunities to embed environmental protection in other fields of policy that have impacts on the environment.
- The prevention principle means that government policy should aim to prevent, reduce or mitigate harm.
- The rectification at source principle means that if damage to the environment cannot be prevented it should be tackled at its origin.
- The polluter pays principle that those who cause pollution or damage to the environment should be responsible for mitigation or compensation.
- The precautionary principle states that where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, a lack of scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

11. Workforce

Returning to offices plan and workstyles review

11.1. Following introduction of the Government's 'stay at home' message in March 2020, the Council moved quickly to support all staff to work from home where this was appropriate to their role. Routine projects to upgrade IT software and refresh equipment were already well progressed and this enabled the majority of staff to work remotely with relative ease.

11.2. The impact of the pandemic has provided an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate our planned changes to how we work in the future, and as the easing of the lockdown restrictions continues, the Council is planning future working arrangements and the safe return to the workplace.

11.3. Our reset and recovery planning includes considerations of working practices and models of service delivery. Using feedback from teams about the successes and challenges of working remotely over the last year, as well as the needs of the service, the Council has established a project to evolve its working practices and spaces to ensure we have modern and flexible workspaces that enable hybrid ways of working.

11.4. Human Resources and Organisational Development, Property and IT & Digital have been working collaboratively to provide a holistic response to changing working practices. There will be small changes to some of our physical spaces to create different types of workspaces, such as confidential zones, drop-in desk space, and adapting meeting rooms to maximise the effectiveness of hybrid meetings. IT & Digital will be rolling out a wider suite of video conferencing equipment in meeting rooms, as well as providing support to staff to increase digital competency and ensure we are getting the most out of the tools available. Underpinning these changes will be a suite of support to staff through training modules, a hybrid working policy and a toolkit of resources on the intranet.

11.5. New working practices will drive efficiency, as well as significantly reduce carbon emissions through a reduced requirement for staff travel. We also expect the success of hybrid working arrangements to enable us to attract and secure job applicants from a much wider geography than we have done traditionally, including outside of East Sussex.

11.6. The Council has also committed to enhancing its wellbeing offer to support staff during the pandemic, and we will continue to invest in supporting staff and managers as the way we work changes and develops.

12. Supporting Services

12.1. This section outlines current and anticipate developments and programmes of work within ESCC's support services.

Manging Back Office Systems

12.2. The Modernising Back Office Systems (MBOS) Programme was established to replace the Council's core finance and Human Resources (HR) systems. The current SAP system will no longer be supported by the supplier beyond 2027. Replacing a system originally implemented over fifteen years ago provides opportunities to take advantage of new technology better able to support an agile and flexible workforce, and to provide easily accessible data and insight to support management decision-making. The vision of the MBOS Programme is to "implement a suite of back office systems that best meet the current and future needs of the Council and which provides optimal return on investment".

12.3. The programme has undertaken an extensive and robust procurement process and recommended a preferred bidder for award of contract. The replacement system will deliver clear benefits, including a better user experience, undertaking transactional activity - freeing staff up to focus on more complex and value- added advice, and better availability of data and management reporting.

12.4. Following contract finalisation, the Programme will move to its implementation phase. Programme governance and resourcing is being refreshed to ensure that it is fit for purpose for a complex implementation involving the replacement of the organisation's critical finance, HR, recruitment and procurement systems. Closure of the programme is expected in late 2023 or 2024.

Orbis Partnership

12.5. The Orbis Partnership was set up to drive efficiencies in support functions through integration and standardisation, and to create greater operational resilience to deliver value for money and improved service delivery for the customer.

12.6. East Sussex and Surrey County Councils have been working in partnership on business services since 2015 through Orbis. Brighton & Hove City Council joined the partnership in May 2017 and Business Services budgets were integrated in April 2018. The partnership has achieved £13.9m ongoing savings since 2016/17 for the partner councils. A further £8.7m of one-off savings has also been delivered.

12.7. Orbis has been through a period of review and refresh to ensure the partnership fits the requirements of each partner, taking into consideration the

increased level of demand for strategic support and capacity from each of the sovereign authorities. The review has concluded that some services will return to sovereign control, and the IT and Digital, Procurement and Internal Audit functions will remain as integrated Orbis services. As a result of this, several changes will be implemented throughout 2021/22 with a new operating model and business plan being developed, and a new Inter-Authority Agreement to be signed by the three partners.

12.8. Moving forward we will have both an internal focus on how we run the partnership but, more importantly, a customer focus on meeting the needs and priorities of the three partner councils as they focus on COVID recovery. This includes:

- developments in service delivery and service user experience through the recovery activity;
- adoption and implementation of digital technologies to support Council priorities;
- further building the digital skills and confidence of the Council's workforce; and
- utilising automation to improve business processes and minimise dependency on manual and paper-based activities.

Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex (SPACES)

12.9. SPACES is a partnership between local authorities, emergency services, health services, the VCSE and several Government departments in East Sussex. The programme was formed in 2011 as part of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership with the aim of collaboration on property based activity (such as co-location and land swaps) in order to make best use of public sector assets. A SPACES Strategy for 2021/22-2023/24 has been agreed, setting the ambition for SPACES to enable and drive wider outcomes such as regeneration, housing development, sustainability and health and social care integration. The partnership will also support the work of the workplace reset activity across partners.

12.10. Partners continue to deliver the One Public Estate (OPE) projects, having received £1.09m of Government funding across Phases 5, 6, 7 and 8. The projects are spread across all the East Sussex district and boroughs, with activities varying from emergency services co-location to town centre regeneration, office accommodation use across the public sector, provision of new training facilities and housing (including key worker accommodation). We will be looking to engage in the next round of OPE funding along with other external funding such as the Brownfield Land Release Fund.

Property Asset Management

12.11. The Council's new Asset Management Plan 2020-2025 contains an action plan to ensure operational assets are used efficiently. There is a property disposal workstream that provides capital receipts, which is integral to the Capital Strategy. There is a greater emphasis to ensure the Council's assets continue to reduce their carbon footprint and that capital investment is targeted to improve environmental sustainability. The Council's service needs will evolve following the coronavirus pandemic and this will affect the demands on its assets and the standards these need to be delivered to.

Digital technology

12.12. A Digital Strategy is being developed to provide a framework to connect corporate and departmental digital technology investment decisions and to provide a One Council view of the development of digital technology and skills. Building on the foundations that equipped the Council with the technology to maintain continuity of services and respond to new service demands during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it will set out a direction of travel to harness technology to support new ways of working and enable collaboration with partners. With residents and community outcomes central to the strategy, it will direct and support the adoption of digital technology to support the delivery of the Council's priorities.

12.13. Specific work is also taking place in ASCH to ensure the positive elements of digital practice implemented in response to COVID-19 are embedded longer-term. ASCH's 'Being Digital Strategy' covers four distinct strands – people (namely, clients and carers), practice, providers and partnerships. Through the use of technology, residents will be supported to have access to the information they need to make choices about their care, and to engage with services in a way and at a time that suits them. Staff will be supported, ensuring tools, systems and equipment are implemented and used to ensure effective and productive services. The strategy and its associated projects aim to improve outcomes for people and allow better co-ordination of care across the NHS and Social Care, a requirement outlined in the NHS White Paper (see 3.28 – 3.32 above). Children's Services are also developing a digital programme to embed positive outcomes from the use of digital technology during the pandemic.

12.14. A significant digital enabler for the Council will be the implementation of a replacement wide area network (a network extending over a large geographical area). The primary outcome will be an ultra-fast digital network that can be used by the Council and its schools, and potentially other public service partners in East Sussex. This upgraded infrastructure will support the Council's digital ambitions with faster, secure, and resilient connectivity to cloud hosted services. This investment in gigabit capable fibre infrastructure will further support the investment already made in improving broadband in East Sussex, as well as contributing significant social value.

Procurement Green Paper and Bill

12.15. Following the UK's exit from the EU, the Government is taking the opportunity to replace the current procurement regime, which was transposed from EU procurement directives. In the 2021 Queen's Speech, the Procurement Bill was announced which intends to simplify procurement in the public sector. This will overhaul the complex procurement procedures and replace them with three simple modern procedures. It will also work in conjunction with new National Procurement Policy Statement, which specifically states the importance of collaborative procurement arrangements like the one that currently exists as Orbis Procurement.

12.16. The Government believes the benefits will include increased transparency, simpler accessibility for suppliers, increasing consideration for wider social value and tackling unacceptable behaviour more easily (such as supplier fraud). These changes will take place over the next 18 months to two years and Orbis Procurement has been feeding into them via our links into the Local Government Association and wider networks.

Social Value

12.17. Our Social Value Measurement Charter continues to ensure that social value commitments such as apprenticeships, work experience, support for local community projects and environmental initiatives are secured through Council-procured contracts. To support our endeavours to deliver social value, a new East Sussex Social Value Policy will be developed and published in 2021 with revised targets for 2022/23. The new policy will provide a platform for the delivery of social value through good commissioning, procurement and contract management.

Member Services - virtual committee meetings

12.18. The temporary legislation permitting Members to attend meetings virtually during COVID-19 restrictions expired in May. Since then, the Council has made arrangements to hold essential meetings in person with appropriate COVID-19 safety measures in place in line with national guidance, Public Health advice and local risk assessment. We have also installed hybrid meeting equipment in the Council Chamber, which enables a level of remote attendance where this is permitted and agreed. Views are being sought by Government from local authorities on the longer-term future of virtual meetings through a call for evidence which the Council has responded to.

Redmond Review

12.19. In 2019, Sir Tony Redmond was asked to undertake an independent review of the effectiveness of local authority audit as now practised and the transparency of local authority financial reporting. The Redmond Review put forward 23 recommendations to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for consideration. Update reports have been presented to the Audit Committee.

12.20. The MHCLG will issue a final response later in the year, but in the meantime, it has launched consultations on the mechanism to be used to allocate the £15m announced to support local authorities to meet the rise in audit fees and new burdens resulting from the report, plus proposed changes to the current fee setting arrangements through Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd.

12.21. A further consultation in the summer will provide the opportunity to respond to the recently announced proposal to move the leadership and oversight of the local audit sector to the new Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority, which will replace the Financial Reporting Council.

13. Finance

13.1. The pandemic, and resultant uncertainty has set back the Fair Funding Review (FFR) and Business Rates Retention (BRR), with the development of a multi-year local government settlement likely to be delayed for a further year.

13.2. The 'Fair Funding Review: a review of relative needs and resources' was launched in 2017 to review the baseline funding allocations for local authorities by delivering an up-to-date assessment of their relative needs and resources. The review concluded in 2018, and the Government has published a summary response. The Business Rates Retention Review was also launched in 2017 and concluded in

December 2018, although an outline Government response has not been published. The review considered how to get the right balance of risk and reward and mitigate volatility in the business rates retention system.

13.3. ESCC responded to both reviews and fed into influencing undertaken by national bodies such as the County Councils Network and Society of County Treasurers, emphasising the importance of ESCC receiving fair and appropriate funding to meet the future needs of residents; as well as the limitations of growth in business rates for meeting increased demand for services. Implementation of the reforms has been delayed by Brexit and again by the COVID pandemic.

13.4. No date has been announced for the delivery of the FFR and/or BRR. The Medium Term Financial Plan will be refreshed on the assumption of a further one-year local government settlement for 2022/23. The sustainability of the Council's finances in the longer-term is reliant on national reform of funding for Adult Social Care.

13.5. On 29 June 2021, MHCLG launched a consultation on 'more frequent revaluations' as part of the Fundamental Review of Business Rates. This consultation is seeking views on revising the current 5 year revaluations to 3 year revaluations and any measures required to enable this. It also seeks comments on proposed reform and streamlining of the appeals process. Responses are required by 24th August. Changes to the revaluation process will impact most significantly on Districts and Boroughs as the administering authorities. More frequent valuations would, however, potentially reduce the increase in rental valuations, due to a shorter time period elapsed between each revaluation, and therefore reduce appeals, providing more certainty of receipts.