

Communities, Economy & Transport – end of year 2023/24

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

Economy and environment

Levelling Up Partnerships

As part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda, the Levelling Up Partnerships programme was announced in March 2023. Hastings and Rother were each allocated £20m capital funding to be spent by March 2025 to deliver a tailored approach to place-based regeneration. Over the last year, the Council has worked with other partners and Government officials in preparing a package of proposals for Ministerial sign-off, which were announced on 25 March 2024. The Council directly secured over £7m of funding for five projects, including: Queensway Gateway Road; Hollington youth facility and family hub; and other family and youth support services, and a combined skills capital pot for both areas.

Long Term Plan for Towns

As part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda, the Long Term Plans for Towns programme was launched in October 2023. Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne have been allocated £20m each under this programme. The grant funding is to be awarded as an endowment fund to be spent over a 10-year period (with 75% capital and 25% revenue). The priority investment themes to support the regeneration of the towns include safety and security (community safety); high streets, heritage and regeneration; and transport and connectivity.

Employability and Skills

Over 950 people have been supported to improve their numeracy skills in 2023/24 as part of the Multiply programme. 17 numeracy interventions were delivered in partnership with local training and community organisations. These programmes have included maths for managing finance, maths in catering, and maths in railway engineering.

The Employment and Skills Team have delivered two programmes in 2023/24, Moving on Up and Support into Work, that have supported over 265 homeless and refugee residents into work. The team also secured £250,000 of Government funding to support people in the construction sector to gain new retrofit skills. This will help boost the local economy, while also reducing carbon emissions in the county. The Careers Hub secured funding in 2023/24 to undertake a Steps to Success pilot programme to try to prevent young people becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), through bespoke work experience and one to one support.

234 Industry Champions were supporting schools and colleges at the end of 2023/24, exceeding the target of 210. 1,113 pupils attended Open Doors visits in Q4 alone, providing young people with experiences of the workplace.

Apprenticeships

117 staff enrolled on a new apprenticeship during 2023/24. A wide range of apprenticeships are offered covering the vast majority of the roles at the Council. We also expect to see an increase in uptake from Schools when the undergraduate Teaching apprenticeship is introduced in 2024/25.

In total, we now have 252 staff undertaking an apprenticeship. These range from entry level through to degree level and the focus of the team this year has been on the growth of corporate apprenticeships. There has been an increased uptake in the various management apprenticeships offered, as these are applicable to all departments. These apprenticeships also feed directly into other management development initiatives such as the Ladder to Leadership programme.

Almost all the 25% annual levy spend that can be passed onto small and medium employers throughout the county has now been allocated. This totals over £275K in 2023/24. The Government has recently announced that with effect from April 2024, the 25% will be increased to 50%. The existing framework of the Transform project means that the Council is in a strong position to benefit from this change and increase our levy spend accordingly.

Cultural investment and recovery

The Sussex Story work has been delayed due to performance management issues needing to be addressed on the overall contract awarded to the consultants (**ref i**). As a result, the Council, as the lead contractor on behalf of partners, severed the contract and withheld 25% of the contract fee. A new supplier will be identified to complete the work in 2024/25, with the cost for the outstanding work to be met by the remaining 25% budget. The subsequent second phase of the work will follow once the first stage of the work is completed satisfactorily.

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) work has continued in Q4, in partnership with Local Visitor Economy Partnership members and Visit England. A MICE education session for businesses, in partnership with Visit England, is being planned, and the team are also booked to present at two more exhibits in the summer and autumn.

Broadband

The Broadband Project has completed its final build and is moving into formal contract closure. The Broadband Team is continuing to engage with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) on its centrally run Project Gigabit programme. The contract for East and West Sussex and Brighton & Hove has been let by BDUK to CityFibre. We understand that the Gigabit Voucher scheme run by BDUK is currently closed in East Sussex and we have no indication of future plans. The Broadband Team is continuing to push BDUK for details of how they plan to cover the very hardest to reach properties in the county.

Job creation

East Sussex Invest provides loans and grants to local businesses to help create local jobs and support businesses to become environmentally responsible. As part of a wider corporate approach, applications for funding through the scheme were suspended in Q2, while an independent Strategic and Operational Review of the scheme was undertaken. The review was completed in Q4, and options for the future of the fund are now being developed.

Environment and climate change

We have continued to work together with partners to develop and deliver carbon reduction and climate change adaptation work. In 2023/24 this included:

- securing funding from the South East Net Zero Hub for a feasibility study for a potential solar farm on a former landfill site, the study has now begun
- securing £245,000 from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to develop a plan to provide people with the skills to enable the retrofit of domestic properties to reduce their carbon emissions
- assisting 44 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to measure their carbon footprint, and awarding grants to 21 SMEs to improve energy efficiency and install renewable energy systems, which will reduce their energy bills
- identifying Council fleet vehicles potentially suitable for EV transition at the end of their current leasing periods and starting work on cost analysis
- starting a county-wide assessment of climate risks and vulnerabilities to inform our climate adaptation work

Planning

100% of County Matter applications were determined with the statutory determination period in 2023/24, against a target of 70%. 100% of County Council development applications were also determined within 8 weeks or within an agreed extension of time during 2023/24, against a target of 70%.

Highways, transport and waste

Highways improvements and road condition

Work continued in Q4 using the additional funding for highways approved by the Council. 183 patches across 116 sites were completed bringing the total completed in 2023/24 to 564 patches across 337 sites. This has had a significant impact on the condition of the network and has enabled us to carry out works above and beyond our usual programmes. 102 signs have been replaced in 2023/24 with a further 427 signs scheduled to be replaced in 2024/25. This work will focus on the repair and replacement of damaged or missing signs. Further work has begun cleaning signs and clearing vegetation or obstructions around signs where necessary.

The focus for the additional drainage spend has been on delivering schemes that are quick and simple to design and will address the most urgent drainage issues. Around 180 schemes have been delivered in 2023/24, including replacing gully covers and clearing significant blockages. 53 larger schemes have been identified and will be delivered in 2024/25. The remaining budget for the refresh of road markings has now been fully allocated and will include renewing the lining along the A22 Hailsham bypass and around 600 further sites across the county. However, due to high levels of rainfall in the winter, the majority of these works will not be delivered until Q1 2024/25.

9,691 potholes were repaired in Q4, with 8,579 of these being carriageway potholes, the remainder were primarily footway potholes. Amongst the carriageway potholes, 70% of these were completed within the required timescales. 29,357 potholes were repaired in 2023/24, with 24,411 of these being carriageway potholes, the remainder were primarily footway potholes. 117 road improvement schemes were completed in 2023/24 to improve the condition of the roads. 100 larger scale schemes were also delivered across the county, including schemes such as Diplocks Way in Hailsham and Bunny Lane in Frant.

The road condition outturns (where a lower figure indicates better road condition), were published in Q3. These figures are only available at one point each year and are based on specialist laser surveys undertaken in summer 2023. The outturns refer to the percentage of road length across the entire county, and all roads are likely to have a mixture of green, amber and red road condition sections. The surveys measure road condition in 10m sections. The road condition outturns reported here are the percentage of 10m sections that should be considered for maintenance. So, for example, a proportion of 5% indicates that 5% of all 10m sections surveyed of that road type should be considered for maintenance. The percentage of Principal roads requiring maintenance was 4%, against a target of 4%. The percentage of Non-Principal roads requiring maintenance was 5% against a target of 4%. The percentage of Unclassified roads requiring maintenance was 17%, against a target of 14%.

Road safety

24 road safety infrastructure schemes were completed in 2023/24 on identified high risk sites/routes to improve road safety, against a target of 24. During 2023/24, 551 Bikeability courses were delivered to 4,428 individuals. 343 'Wheels for All' sessions were delivered to 3,862 attendees. The targets for the year were to deliver Bikeability training to 4,000 people and to also deliver 100 'Wheels for All' sessions.

Transport and parking

Improvements have been implemented in 2023/24 using the £41.4m of funding assigned to East Sussex as part of the Government's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) including:

- £13m of bus service improvements, including the Flexibus, Digital Demand Responsive Transport service covering over 90% of East Sussex. The service has seen continued passenger growth due to continued marketing and improvements to the service
- £5m for reduced fares in the county which are scheduled to run until April 2025
- improvements have been made to the bus stop Infrastructure, including the installation of 2,560 QR code plates, new hard standing areas and the installation of new Real Time Information signs at a number of stops
- 32 traffic light junctions have been identified for bus priority improvements and these schemes are due to commence in 2024/25

Following the approval of a business plan and draft contract submitted in November 2023, the Council has now received 90% of the £4.441m allocated to East Sussex from the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund. The remaining 10% will be paid once the final contract has been approved. The funding will support the delivery of on street electric vehicle chargepoints in the county. It is expected that procurement of the contract will begin in Q2 2024/25, and that initial work to deliver chargepoints will follow in Q4 2024/25.

A Hastings Parking review made several recommended changes to parking restrictions in the town and the majority of these have now been implemented, with the final changes expected to be in place by May 2024. A review of parking in Rother was considered by the Planning Committee in July 2023, and all the agreed changes have now been implemented.

The Home to School Transport Team successfully arranged transport for over 5,000 children at the start of the new school year in September 2023. The team have also completed several projects to improve the efficiency of the service and help mitigate cost increases. The Team worked with Children's Services to review possible mitigations to pressures in the service. The review identified opportunities to increase efficiency, strengthen the transport market and avoid costs. Improvements have also been made to the service, following the implementation of Pax, the new client and contract database. The integration with QRoutes, a route optimisation tool, has delivered efficiencies in the processing of applications and route allocation.

Waste

Changes were made to the chargeable waste service in January 2024, allowing residents to bring small amounts of DIY waste for free to all of our Household Waste and Recycling Sites (HWRS). Hard plastic recycling was introduced at Seaford and Eastbourne HWRS, meaning half the sites in the county now offer this. The recycling of hard plastics, rather than sending them to the Newhaven Energy Recovery Facility, has reduced our carbon impact by an estimated 125.5 tonnes in 2023/24. Eastbourne HWRS began to open early as part of a trial to help residents recycle more and reduce queues at the site in 2023/24. The trial proved a success and early opening has continued, allowing residents access 30 minutes earlier than previously on Monday to Friday. Recycling containers for vapes were added to all East Sussex HWRS in 2023/24.

The projected 2023/24 outturn for the amount of waste re-used, recycled or composted or used beneficially is 56.0%, based on the outturn at the end of December 2023 (reported in arrears). Residual waste and kerbside recycling rates are slightly lower than forecast. This might be partly due to cost-of-living increases. However, green waste and waste sent for beneficial use are higher than forecast, which has helped to maintain the rate.

Rights of Way (RoW) and Countryside Sites

Due to the very wet winter weather, the Rights of Way Team have managed several significant flooding, landslide and cliff fall events around East Sussex in recent months. These have affected public access and are typically longer-term issues which may require a diversion or closure of the affected path. Funding from High Wealth National Landscape (HWNL) has enabled the team to set up a 'free gates for stiles' scheme. Once complete, this will see 120 stiles replaced with gates in the HWNL area. The funding has also provided several new benches for the Forest Way County Park. The team have also begun to install Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) bridges in appropriate locations on the path network. Glass Reinforced Plastic is stronger and has a longer lifespan than timber, so will improve the longevity of the larger bridges we manage.

We completed 95% of high priority maintenance work on schedule in 2023/24, against a target of 80%. Due to continued wet weather in Q4, rangers undertook both reactive and planned work, particularly at countryside sites, where access was possible.

Communities

Trading Standards

79 businesses and individuals received training and advice from Trading Standards in Q4. During 2023/24 a total of 653 businesses and individuals received training and advice, against a target of 350. Trading Standards made 886 positive interventions to protect vulnerable people in Q4. During 2023/24 Trading Standards made 2,669 positive interventions in total, against a target of 200, which included installing call blockers to protect vulnerable people from scammers.

Libraries

7,198 children took part in the Summer Reading Challenge during summer 2023, against a target of 5,100, the highest total since 2018. The challenge aims to encourage primary school children to read books during the summer holidays. 4,258 participants completed the challenge, a 23% increase compared to 2022.

The Libraries team have worked with colleagues across the Council and schools to reintroduce work experience placements at libraries across the county. 65 young people started placements in libraries during 2023/24.

387 people enrolled on Family Learning Programmes at East Sussex libraries in Q4. 197 of these were in Family Learning, English, Maths and Language programmes. 190 were in Wider Family Learning programmes. Throughout 2023/24, 2,051 people enrolled, against a target of 500, with 1,008 of these in Family Learning, English, Maths and Language programmes and 1,043 in Wider Family Learning programmes.

28 people passed online learning courses, including in IT, English and Maths in our libraries in Q4. In total during 2023/24, 88 people passed courses, against a target of 70.

Revenue Budget Summary

The CET revenue budget is £71.641m and has underspent by £1.733m. The largest underspend is in Transport and Operations where current market prices mean that electricity and recycling income exceeded budget in the Waste Service and the budgeted draw down of £2.335m was not required (**ref vi**). The underspend in Communities is mostly due to staff vacancies in Trading Standards and Road Safety with additional income from Emergency Planning training (**ref v**). Customer and Libraries have underspent due to staff costs and additional income in libraries, and slippage in maintenance at the Keep (**ref iv**). The largest overspend is in Highways and is due to the estimated increased cost of electricity for streetlighting (**ref vii**). The overspend in Planning and Environment is mostly within the Transport Development Control budget and can be attributed to the lack of up-to-date Local Plans in the county, which has led to an increase in speculative planning applications for

residential developments, which often have challenging transport issues that need addressing. Consequentially, we have seen a rise in the number of applications that have required specialist input (e.g. transport modelling) and/or have become subject to planning appeals, which are particularly resource intensive and have often required short-term consultancy support (ref ix). The overspend in Economy is mostly due to the cost of consultants engaged to help transition South East Local Enterprise Partnership funded projects back into Council control (ref viii). The Parking saving was not achieved this year and is covered by a one-year budget increase (ref ii). The Environmental Services saving was not achieved and will be addressed going forward (ref iii).

Capital Programme Summary

The CET capital programme has a gross budget of £57.393m and there is slippage of £7.317m, overspend of £566k, and spend in advance of £542k. The slippage is mostly in the Highways Structural Maintenance programme where design work must be completed on larger drainage schemes before construction which will now take place in 2024/25 (ref xv). There have been delays in progressing project briefs which has delayed construction on Other Integrated Transport Schemes (ref xiii). Slippage in the Bridge Strengthening programme is due to wet weather and delays in securing Environment Agency permits (ref xvii). Exceat Bridge has slipped due to outstanding project design, discharging planning conditions and ongoing land acquisitions (ref xiv). The prioritisation of gangs onto carriageway patching works along with high levels of rainfall has caused slippage in road signage and marking schemes (ref xvi). The phase three Broadband contract has now ended however the accrual for the final settlement was overestimated resulting in a negative spend this year (ref x). Slippage in the Bus Service Improvement Plan Bus Priority scheme is due to a public consultation review which may require a rescoping of works in the new year (ref xii). The Bexhill to Hastings Link Road overspend is due to the outstanding archaeology, ecology, and Part 1 compensation claims (ref xi). There are additional schemes with smaller variations to their budgets.

Performance exceptions (Q4 – See How to read this report for definition)

Priority – Driving sustainable economic growth

Performance measure	Outturn 22/23	Target 23/24	RAG Q1 23/24	RAG Q2 23/24	RAG Q3 23/24	RAG Q4 23/24	2023/24 outturn	Note ref
Create a pan-Sussex visitor economy group to re-start the leisure, hospitality, culture, retail and tourism economy and enhance existing marketing vehicles	Sussex Tourism Leadership Group established	Develop a shared Sussex Story and assets to promote the region. Develop a shared Sussex Meetings, Inceptive, Conferences and Events (MICE) initiative	G	G	G	R	Completion of shared Sussex Story and assets delayed until 2024/25	i

Savings exceptions 2023/24 (£'000)

Service description	Original Target For 2023/24	Target including items c/f from previous year(s)	Achieved in-year	Will be achieved, but in future years	Cannot be achieved	Note ref
Parking	-	745	-	745	-	ii
Libraries	105	105	105	-	-	
Environmental Services	-	60	-	-	60	iii
	-	-	-	-	-	
Total Savings	105	910	105	745	60	
			-	-	-	
			-	-	-	
Subtotal Permanent Changes ¹			0	0	0	
Total Savings and Permanent Changes	105	910	105	745	60	

Memo: treatment of savings not achieved in the year (£'000)	Temporary Funding ²	Part of reported variance ³	Total	Note Ref
Parking	745	-	745	
Environmental Services	-	60	60	
Total	745	60	805	

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

² Temporary funding will only replace a slipped or unachieved saving for one year; the saving will still need to be made in future years (or be replaced with something else).

³ The slipped or unachieved saving will form part of the department's overall variance - it will either increase an overspend or decrease an underspend. The saving will still need to be made in future years (or be replaced with something else).

Revenue Budget 2023/24 (£'000)

Divisions	Planned Gross	Planned Income	Planned Net	2023/24 Gross	2023/24 Income	2023/24 Net	(Over)/ under spend Gross	(Over)/ under spend Income	(Over)/ under spend Net	Note ref
Management and Support	6,214	(4,804)	1,410	4,180	(2,768)	1,412	2,034	(2,036)	(2)	
Customer, Library and Registration	9,986	(4,501)	5,485	9,764	(4,573)	5,191	222	72	294	iv
Communities	3,279	(877)	2,402	3,478	(1,473)	2,005	(199)	596	397	v
Transport & Operational Services	111,471	(69,533)	41,938	107,119	(67,226)	39,893	4,352	(2,307)	2,045	vi
Highways	21,127	(3,578)	17,549	23,492	(5,363)	18,129	(2,365)	1,785	(580)	vii
Economy	3,297	(1,581)	1,716	3,404	(1,548)	1,856	(107)	(33)	(140)	viii
Planning and Environment	4,383	(3,242)	1,141	5,306	(3,884)	1,422	(923)	642	(281)	ix
Total CET	159,757	(88,116)	71,641	156,743	(86,835)	69,908	3,014	(1,281)	1,733	

Capital programme 2023/24 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget 2023/24	Actual 2023/24	Variation (Over) / under 2023/24 budget	Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend	Variation analysis: Slippage to future year	Variation analysis: Spend in advance	Note ref
The Keep	1,096	1,096	228	-	228	-	228	-	
Peacehaven Refurbishment and Conversion	70	70	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Libraries	5,139	5,139	580	442	138	-	138	-	
Broadband	33,800	33,800	160	(269)	429	-	429	-	x
Bexhill and Hastings Link Road	126,247	128,347	-	566	(566)	(566)	-	-	xi
BHLR Complementary Measures	1,800	1,800	100	48	52	-	52	-	
Economic Intervention Fund	8,884	8,884	75	72	3	-	3	-	
Economic Intervention Fund Loans	3,000	3,000	80	53	27	-	27	-	
Stalled Sites Fund	916	916	13	13	-	-	-	-	
EDS Upgrading Empty Commercial Properties	500	500	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Community Focused Road Safety Interventions	750	750	206	175	31	-	31	-	
Climate Emergency Works	9,929	9,929	3,005	2,831	174	-	174	-	
Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme	963	963	905	1,135	(230)	-	-	(230)	
Flood Management SuDS	420	420	190	202	(12)	-	-	(12)	
SALIX Decarbonisation - Ninfield School	145	145	-	-	-	-	-	-	
SALIX Decarbonisation	369	369	-	12	(12)	-	-	(12)	
Newhaven Port Access Road	23,271	23,271	28	(36)	64	-	64	-	
Real Time Passenger Information	3,181	3,181	155	132	23	-	23	-	
Bus Service Improvement Plan	18,500	18,500	500	188	312	-	312	-	xii
BSIP Passenger Transport	3,815	3,815	2,045	2,174	(129)	-	-	(129)	
Replacement Lewes Road Bus Station	100	100	4	4	-	-	-	-	
PAX Software System	37	37	26	21	5	-	5	-	
Hastings and Bexhill Movement & Access Package	9,583	9,583	(79)	(125)	46	-	46	-	
Eastbourne/South Wealden Walking & Cycling Package	6,936	6,936	79	89	(10)	-	-	(10)	
Hailsham /Polegate/ Eastbourne Movement & Access Corridor	2,251	2,251	350	260	90	-	90	-	

APPENDIX 6

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget 2023/24	Actual 2023/24	Variation (Over) / under 2023/24 budget	Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend	Variation analysis: Slippage to future year	Variation analysis: Spend in advance	Note ref
Eastbourne Town Centre Movement & Access Package A	6,936	6,936	800	521	279	-	279	-	
Eastbourne Town Centre Movement & Access Package B	5,454	5,454	100	78	22	-	22	-	
Other Integrated Transport Schemes	66,753	66,753	2,695	1,639	1,056	-	1,056	-	xiii
A22 Corridor Package	1,143	1,143	207	207	-	-	-	-	
Community Match Fund	780	780	95	29	66	-	66	-	
Area-wide traffic management scheme – Schools Streets	200	200	175	169	6	-	6	-	
Emergency Active Travel Fund Tranche 2	1,456	1,456	-	(3)	3	3	-	-	
ATF Eastbourne Liveable Town Centre	274	274	37	58	(21)	-	-	(21)	
Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections	9,689	9,689	574	359	215	-	215	-	
Exceat Bridge	10,591	10,591	1,259	632	627	-	627	-	xiv
Queensway Depot Development	1,956	1,956	104	(16)	120	-	120	-	
Core Programme - Highways Structural Maintenance	498,675	498,675	35,893	33,877	2,016	-	2,016	-	xv
Visibly Better Roads	5,800	5,800	1,293	789	504	-	504	-	xvi
Core Programme - Bridge Assessment Strengthening	38,785	38,785	2,740	1,955	785	-	785	-	xvii
Core Programme - Street Lighting - Life Expired Equipment	39,561	39,561	2,000	2,150	(150)	-	-	(150)	
Core Programme - Street Lighting - SALIX scheme	2,961	2,961	219	219	-	-	-	-	
Core- Rights of Way Surface Repairs and Bridge Replacement Programme	10,417	10,417	552	534	18	-	18	-	
Total CET Gross (Planned Programme)	963,133	965,233	57,393	51,184	6,209	(563)	7,336	(564)	