

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1) Question from Councillor Field to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

The booking system for the Household Waste and Recycling Service (HWRS) works well for those who use it. There are however many who for whatever reason do not. The result of this is charity shops reporting that items which should have been disposed of at the HWRS are “hiding” under a few legitimate donated items which means that the charities have to pay for their disposal. Parish councils are also reporting additional waste being left in or near their bins so that the Parish Council which pays for waste removal by weight is paying for items to be disposed of which would otherwise have gone to the HWRS.

What are the comparative figures for waste disposal at the HWRS before and after the booking system began?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The booking system is straightforward and simple to use. Since its introduction on 24 November 2025, it has facilitated approximately 223,000 bookings. Residents are neither limited nor restricted in their ability to bring waste to the sites and are able to make same day bookings, subject to slot availability.

I am aware that the third sector, and the textile recycling industry in particular, is currently experiencing significant challenges. Several national textile recycling companies have recently ceased collections, which has had an impact on the flow of donations to charity shops. This can be observed at many supermarket car parks, where textile and bric-a-brac containers are full and often overflowing.

The decline in the quality of donations to charity shops is a longstanding trend driven by several factors, including the rise of fast fashion, low-cost manufacturing, increased consumption of inexpensive goods, and the absence of producer responsibility for the disposal or recycling of many of the items most commonly donated.

To date, the Council has not been made aware of any increase in waste collected by Parish Councils. Waste collection services are primarily delivered by district and borough councils, and none have reported similar issues to the East Sussex County Council Waste Team.

One of the reasons the booking system was introduced was to prevent traders from accessing the sites. It is unlawful to dispose of trade or business waste at household sites; such waste must be taken to a licensed commercial waste facility. Since the system was implemented, we have recorded an overall reduction in tonnage of approximately 10% at our household waste recycling sites, compared with the same period last year. This reduction is consistent with the original expectations that limiting trade waste would decrease the volume of material entering the sites and therefore reflects the intended purpose of the booking system.

2) Question from Councillor Taylor to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Across several parishes there appear to be numerous unresolved problems where water is running down carriageways and damaging the road surface. In many cases, the drainage assets intended to remove water from the highway—such as gullies, grips, ditches and associated pipework—are either blocked, broken or obstructed.

As a result, water is not being properly discharged to watercourses or designated outfalls, which contributes to the deterioration of the road fabric and the formation of potholes.

Simply clearing gully pots is often ineffective if the connecting pipework or wider drainage infrastructure is not functioning. In one parish alone there are at least twelve outstanding drainage issues of varying scale, including at least two cases that have reportedly been known about for more than five years, have been investigated, and for which schemes were identified but not delivered.

Residents are increasingly concerned that without proper maintenance of drainage assets, road conditions will continue to deteriorate and lead to higher long-term repair costs.

Could the Lead Member please explain what action the County Council is taking to address the growing number of long-standing highway drainage issues within the ward?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

In 2025, the County Council reviewed and updated its Highways Asset Management Strategy. This included the Drainage Asset Management Plan – please find the following link for ease of reference:

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/roads/highway-policies/drainage-asset-management-plan>

The Drainage Asset Management Plan forms part of the County Council's suite of strategic asset management documents and is aligned with the Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy. It complements other Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plans (HIAMP), including those for carriageways, footways, cycleways, and structures. The plan sets out the Council's approach to managing highway drainage infrastructure. It replaces the 2015–2018 Drainage Strategy and incorporates significant developments in asset management practices, risk-based planning, and the Council's commitment to network resilience. It provides guidance for internal teams and delivery partners involved in the operation, maintenance, and improvement of the highway drainage network.

During 2025/26 to date, East Sussex Highways has completed 117 separate drainage and flooding projects within Forest Row and Groombridge. Typically, this involves identifying and removing blockages in both gullies and pipes so that the system is flowing. However, at 21 sites, further works have been identified as being required and these will be followed up with additional works by the highway's drainage team.

a) What resources are currently allocated to highway drainage maintenance and repair?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

In 2025/26, East Sussex Highways utilised the following resources:

- East Sussex Highways typically employs four mechanical gully cleansing vehicles to complete the cyclical (planned) programme (circa 67,000 gullies attended per year in East Sussex)
- Ditching gangs to complete the cyclical ditch maintenance programme (approximately 137 miles).
- Two high powered surface water jetters to clear drainage defects and floods as well as carry out drainage investigations.
- One reactive gang to carry out minor works available for use at ad hoc known flooding hotspots.

Resources for 2026/27 are yet to be confirmed but will likely consist of the resources listed above plus a crew to tackle locations where cars are routinely parked and where jammed gully covers have been identified.

b) What work the County's drainage team is undertaking to address known failures in drainage infrastructure?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

To maximise the impact of limited resources, the Council prioritises drainage works based on risk, asset condition, and strategic importance. Investment planning focuses funding on schemes that offer the greatest benefit in terms of safety, resilience, and network performance. Drainage maintenance schemes are selected using a structured, risk-based methodology.

Key criteria include:

- Risk score – Reflecting asset condition, consequence of failure, and criticality.
- Incident History – Prioritising locations with frequent flooding or performance issues.
- Network Hierarchy – Favouring strategic routes, emergency access, and economically significant areas.
- Asset Type and age – With more frequent review of aging or data-deficient assets.
- Cost-Effectiveness – Supporting schemes that offer measurable performance gains and long-term savings.

- Once identified, schemes undergo feasibility assessment, budgeting, and approval before inclusion in the annual works programme.

The forecast investment into drainage infrastructure for 26/27 is £800,000 for routine and reactive works and £1,000,000 for capital works. The programme seeks to address existing drainage issues prior to carriageway schemes being delivered as well targeted work picked up from drainage investigations resulting from internal observations or public inquires.

c) What plans are in place to resolve long-standing drainage cases that continue to damage the highway network?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Drainage cases are prioritised as per the methodology noted above, noting the ongoing budget constraints the Council faces. In the long term we will continue to focus on the development areas noted in the Drainage Asset Management Plan. The aim is to:

- Improve condition data across all drainage and asset types
- Better understand system interdependencies and third-party influences
- Secure sustained investment and external funding to deliver long-term solutions.

By carrying out these activities we hope we can minimise reactive issues by tackling the underlying issues.

With respects to the Forest Row and Groombridge ward, there are no specific capital schemes proposed for 2026/27.

3) Question from Councillor Wright to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Current ESCC verge cutting policy is to do two cuts per year. Eastbourne Borough Council policy was to do an additional 5 to 6 cuts per year but they have now withdrawn that service, saying that they can no longer afford to do so and that the County Council is the responsible authority for verge cutting.

Grass verges in Meads, Eastbourne Division are particularly affected by the reduction in verge cutting due to the extent of grass verges in Meads and the fact that many trees (on the verges) have had to be cut down due to disease. The result of less cutting results in verges packed with weeds and tree suckers (coming up from the cut tree's roots) which is unsightly and provides a safety risk for residents queuing at bus stops and for car drivers exiting the many driveways from flats and houses. At the end of last year residents reported to me that they were having to step out into the road to attract the attention of buses and could not see if there was oncoming traffic when exiting driveways.

In addition, two cuts per year produces an abundance of vegetation debris following the cut. The debris composts on the pavements and in the gutters. This provides a

growing medium for grass and weeds to grow which will eventually cover the pavements making them inaccessible and blocks drains creating water pooling on roads so adding to the problems of potholes and further deterioration to the already declining fabric of the roads.

A change of ESCC policy is required to deal with the issues raised above which will affect residents this coming growing season 2026.

Could the Lead Member please advise on how ESCC intends to deal with the problem of out-of-control verges in Meads, Eastbourne which will form an unsightly and risk provoking, dense scrub of weeds and tree bushes plus grass/weed covered pavements if only two cuts per year are maintained without other action?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

The County Council policy on cutting grass verges is to cut grass verges twice a year, reflecting the decision by Lead Member in May 2018 to reduce the grass cutting service to two grass cuts per year as part of the RPPR cost-saving measures at that time. However, the revised grass cutting policy includes the ability for lower tier authorities to either pay ESCC for additional cuts, or to take on the grass cutting themselves where this is a local priority, and until this year Eastbourne Borough Council had elected to take on the grass cutting across the Borough themselves and in doing so, fund additional cuts. EBC has elected to no longer do this and handed back grass cutting to the County Council, but regrettably the Council cannot afford to provide more than the standard two cuts per year that is provided across the county. Whilst the Council cannot require residents to do so, a number of residents do cut the verges outside their properties of their own volition. Where visibility at junctions is impeded, this can be reported via the East Sussex Highways website, and the local Highway Steward can arrange for the visibility splay to be cut back.

4) Question from Councillor Wright to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

The current state of the roads in Meads, Eastbourne and greater Eastbourne is appalling with very many potholes and the fabric of the local roads disintegrating. Car tyres are being shredded, the roads are unsafe and residents are desperate for a solution to the problem.

One solution would be for ESCC to raise emergency funding and to schedule emergency work to tackle the potholes and resurfacing of local roads as soon as possible starting April 2026.

Could the Lead Member please confirm what action the Council is taking in this regard?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

With regard to potholes, it is important these are reported via the East Sussex Highways website or perhaps arrange to meet with the local Highways Steward. Councillors will know that the Highways Act does not require us to repair every pothole

or defect on our roads, to do so would be prohibitively expensive and place even greater burden on Council Taxpayers. Instead, the Highways Act requires us to publish and work to maintenance policies that set out the Council's intervention criteria that our Stewards use to determine when a pothole repair is required and the repair timescales.

With regard to resurfacing, the resurfacing, patching and surface dressing programmes are published on the East Sussex Highways website.

As the weather improves as we go into spring the combination of reporting potholes and our activities to repair potholes, and establishment of our resurfacing and patching programmes will improve the condition of the highways network.

Councillors will be aware that in recent years the Council has borrowed additional funding for highways maintenance but can no longer afford to do so. As such investment in planned highway maintenance is limited to DfT funding only.

5) Question from Councillor Wright to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Whilst pleased that that a new double span Exceat bridge should be completed this year (2026) and other A259 improvements are being implemented, this is likely to increase the levels of traffic on the road as part of ESCC policy to take load off the A27.

There is concern from my residents that the extra traffic could cause a choke point coming into Eastbourne on the East Dean Rd, resulting in through-traffic turning off at Warren Hill and using Beachy Head Rd and Upper Dukes Drive so that Meads becomes a rat run for high-speed traffic.

Could the Lead Member please confirm:

- **What traffic modelling has been done to quantify the likely increase in traffic on the A259 as a result of the road and bridge improvements.**
- **What the results of that modelling was, if any**
- **If ESCC has any mitigation solutions in mind to prevent Meads becoming a rat run for high-speed through traffic.**

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

A traffic modelling report has been carried out.

The report concluded that there will be a negligible increase in traffic/vehicle levels as a result of the proposed two-way arrangement over the bridge.

- The AM peak (08:00-09:00) estimates there would be an increase of around 38 PCUs (passenger car unit) which is an overall increase of 3%.
- The PM peak (17:00-18:00) estimates there would be an increase of around 36 PCUs (passenger car unit) along the A259 as a result of the new bridge which is an overall increase of 3%.

The main purpose of the two-lane bridge is to ease congestion, reduce journey times and improve accessibility for visitors to the area rather than increasing the volume of traffic. This will particularly improve journey times and reliability for buses making public transport a more attractive option for travellers. Also note recent improvements to traffic flow along the A27 aimed at reducing the amount of long-distance traffic using the A259.

6) Question from Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

East Sussex County Council have now contracted Jackson Civil Engineering to deliver the construction of the new bridge at Exceat.

a) Can the Lead Member confirm that their tender came in either below or at the County Council's budget?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

We can confirm the Jackson tender price came in within the project budget, and whilst this is commercially confidential, details were shown in the Tender Report that the Director reviewed when awarding the contract to Jackson in November 2025.

b) Will the contractor put up an information board showing the design and proposed route for the new bridge at Exceat?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

The design is available on the ESCC website [online](#) as part of the planning application documentation. The contractor has a comprehensive stakeholder and engagement plan, that will include an 'info hub' to provide regular project updates and information, focussed on reducing impacts on residents, businesses, road users, pedestrians, public transport and other key stakeholders adjacent to site and in the wider area.

7) Question from Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Residents with mobility issues have contacted me regarding an issue with Design Note 12 regarding space on either side of a disabled parking bay. The Design Note does not provide for a space for transfer zones on both sides of a single disabled parking bay.

Can the Lead Member please ensure that the appropriate Design Notes are amended to allow for transfer zones on either side of single disabled parking bays?

Can the Lead Member please also ensure that an audit is carried out on single disabled parking bays across the county to see what remedial action may be needed to make these fully accessible?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

Design note 12 relates to Lewes District and Eastbourne Boroughs accessible design notes for car parks. Requests for changes to the design note will need to be put forward to LDC and EBC. The ESCC parking team manage car parks on behalf of Lewes District, any instruction to audit or make changes to their car parks will need to come from LDC. On- street parking restrictions are required to meet the regulation set out in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions, all formalised on street bays meet these regulations.

8) Question from Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

A business plan for improving the A259 between Eastbourne and Peacehaven was submitted to the last government, including a request for a safe pedestrian crossing at Bishopstone.

What has happened to this plan and what are the current plans for addressing some of the known road safety concerns about the A259?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

The County Council submitted the A259 Strategic Outline Business Case to Government in October 2023 seeking funding from their Major Road Network Fund programme. As you highlight, the package in the business case included the pedestrian crossing at Bishopstone amongst other local transport schemes on the A259 between Telscombe Cliffs and east of Eastbourne.

After responding to various clarification questions from both the Department for Transport (DfT) and Active Travel England between the business case submission and July 2024, we had been waiting for a decision through the 2025 Spending Review on whether the SOBC had been approved before being able to proceed to OBC stage.

After the June 2025 Spending Review, the Government advised that certain pre-programme entry schemes, such as the A259 South Coast Road corridor, committed to by the previous Government may prove financially unviable due to the existing Major Road Network funding shortfall. Therefore, prior to making any decisions regarding potential cancellations, Government wanted to evaluate:

- the continuing necessity of these schemes;
- the ongoing commitment and delivery capacity of local authorities; and
- the financial viability of the schemes.

In response, officers completed and submitted the review questionnaire to DfT in September 2025 responding to these points. In doing so we, re-emphasised the importance of this package to the movement and access of our residents along and across the whole length of the corridor, as well as supporting housing and employment in the area.

Due to Government's current Major Road Network funding levels compared to the total value of its pre-programme entry schemes, DfT now require a local funding

contribution of at least 15% - similar to other MRN projects that the Council is developing - instead of offering 100% full funding. The total value of the package is £27.8m, however, the County Council does not have the over £4m needed to provide the local 15% match contribution due to our own budgetary constraints.

Therefore, officers considered other funding sources such as development contributions or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support the project. As a consequence, following engagement with Lewes District Council, officers submitted a CIL funding bid in December 2025 to the District Council as part of the latest CIL funding bidding round. A decision is expected from the District Council on the CIL bid this Spring.

Through officer's regular engagement with DfT, they have been advised that the Department's review of the A259 package and all the other pre-programme entry schemes across the country is nearing completion with an announcement expected from DfT this Spring on whether the scheme will be able to progress to the next business case stage.

9) Question from Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Children and Families.

Investment firms, private equity-backed companies, and hedge funds own a significant portion of children's homes in England, with studies showing they manage roughly 25% to over 40% of private residential care places. These for-profit providers have grown rapidly, focusing on lucrative, high-cost placements, often sparking concerns which I share about profiteering and the commodification of vulnerable children.

The number of for-profit, private-equity-owned homes in England has more than doubled in the last decade, from 903 in 2014 to over 2,200 in 2023.

These investments are considered "recession-proof," with some firms achieving profit margins exceeding 20%.

Some reports have suggested that a significant portion of these providers are owned by firms based in offshore tax havens.

How many children does East Sussex County Council have in private children's homes? What is the annual expenditure?

Response by the Lead Member for Children and Families

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is currently caring for around 692 children and young people. While most children live with foster families, 107 children (15.7%) are currently living in private children's homes, with these placements projected to cost £36.413m in 2025/26.

ESCC's Home Finding and Commissioning Team applies rigorous quality assurance to ensure children's homes deliver high-quality care and value for money, while balancing the need for constructive relationships with providers in a competitive market. Oversight includes scrutiny of staff training and safer recruitment, Ofsted

ratings and compliance, Regulation 44 reports, location risk assessments, and multi-agency matching discussions to ensure homes meet children's needs.

Costs are examined in detail, with providers required to break down children's home running costs, staffing levels, therapeutic or educational inputs, and profit margins. Children requiring enhanced support are reviewed regularly to ensure staffing and therapeutic costs remain appropriate and reduce when possible.

Alongside Ofsted inspections and statutory social work visits to children, the Home Finding and Commissioning Team conducts both announced and unannounced quality assurance visits to assure safe care and compliance with commissioned support.

East Sussex County Council is part of the South East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) – the RCC is one of two pathfinders in the country and is working at a regional level to improve placement sufficiency and market management across the South East. The RCC is also taking on the management and strengthening regional frameworks to continue to maintain high standards while securing competitive prices with private care providers.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill that is currently going through parliament aims to curb high profiteering in children's social care. The Bill allows the government to introduce a backstop to cap profits for non-local authority care providers (children's homes and fostering agencies) and introduces a financial oversight regime to increase transparency. ESCC is waiting for further details of how these changes will be implemented once the Bill has received Royal Assent.