

## Members' Update – East Sussex County Council – February 2025

Cllr Bob Bowdler - Wealden East Division - *"The Heart of Wealden"*

**(Heathfield, Horam, Hooe, Herstmonceux, Ninfield, Warbleton & Wartling parishes)**

(and temporarily Pevensey & Westham Parishes)

### **LOCAL ISSUES:**

#### **Heathfield, Rushlake Green & Punnetts Town: Water main Update:**

The utility road works are now at the junction of Burwash Road and Battle Road. Major pot holes created in the region of Hugletts Lane and Halley Road junctions (all reported) due to heavy traffic use on one carriageway. The whole of Battle Road has now been inspected and potholes marked for intervention (some already done)!

#### **All Areas - Reported Scam:**

Please look out for potential Scam email/Text messages from The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) which suggests that *"you have not yet completed your 2024 Winter Fuel Allowance application"*. It is utter nonsense, and the giveaway is the *"Good Luck"* sign off!

Please DO NOT click on and any links within unsolicited messages!

### **COUNTY REPORT:**

#### **Adult Social Care**

##### "I test" – Residents urged to test regularly for HIV

People across East Sussex are being encouraged to test regularly for HIV, as part of a national awareness week which began on 10 February. The council is backing the National HIV Testing Week campaign 'I test', which aims to encourage more people to get tested to help stop the spread of the virus. There were 30 new HIV diagnoses in East Sussex in 2022.

In the three-year period between 2020 and 2022, nearly 1 in 3 people diagnosed with HIV in East Sussex were diagnosed at a late stage of infection. A late HIV diagnosis is when someone tests positive for HIV after the virus has already damaged their immune system. This can lead to poorer health outcomes and an increased risk of transmitting the virus to others.

Free finger-prick tests, delivered in discreet packaging, can be ordered online with the results available by text within a few days. Over 7,500 online HIV tests were completed by East Sussex residents in 2024. Anyone diagnosed with HIV in the UK can access free treatment and support.

More information is available [here](#).

## Children's Services

### SEND Local Area Partnership inspection report published

The findings of an inspection into services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in East Sussex have been welcomed by council and health leaders.

The report by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), gives the East Sussex Local Area Partnership the middle rating for the delivery, planning and commissioning of SEND services.

East Sussex County Council and NHS Sussex share responsibility for planning and commissioning services to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in the area.

The report highlighted several areas of good practice and positive examples of work across agencies to provide support for children and young people and their families. It also praised the SEND information, advice and support service and the important guidance that it provides to families. The report identifies areas of improvement for the partnership and partners in education, social care and health will work together to address these.

*More information is available [here](#).*

### Childminding recruitment campaign launched

A new campaign encouraging people to consider becoming childminders has been launched by the county council.

The 'Do something big – work with small children' campaign aims to highlight the benefits of childminding as a career. The campaign is supporting the Government's 'Be part of something big' initiative to promote early years careers.

Childminding can mean anything from working flexible, part time hours to creating a business similar to a small nursery. Childminders can work at home, in a community hall, or partner with a local school and they can also employ assistants. No formal qualifications are needed and the county council can offer support with training, registering with Ofsted or a childminding agency, and grant applications.

The county council is also encouraging people to consider offering wraparound care, usually from 8am until school time or after school until 6pm, with a £600 Wraparound Care Grant available to help cover start-up costs. This grant is available to childminders who complete their registration with Ofsted or a childminder agency between September 1, 2024 and March 31, 2026.

*More information is available [here](#).*

### Schools to pilot government breakfast club scheme

A number of schools in East Sussex are to become early adopters of the government's free school breakfast clubs. Schools in Seaford, Eastbourne and Hastings are among those chosen to pilot the new scheme, which is expected to run from April until June before being expanded.

The schools chosen for the trial are expected to offer a free breakfast to all pupils and at least 30 minutes of childcare before school. Clubs in the county will receive a share of £7m in funding to kick start the plan, which the government says will save families up to £450 a year. If the pilot is successful, plans for a national expansion could begin later this year.

*More information is available [here](#).*

## **Communities, Economy and Transport**

### Creative business support scheme extended

The Government recently announced it will be extending its support for the Create South East programme until March 2026. The initiative continues to be supported by East Sussex County Council, who helped secure the programme for the region in 2022.

The scheme's Investment Readiness programme helps companies develop the skills they need to secure investment and facilitate access to additional funding. Businesses are able to access six to nine months of intensive, tailored support and engage in workshops, programme mentoring and events.

Create South East is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Create Growth Programme and run through a partnership of 12 local and unitary authorities and organisations across the counties of Essex, Kent and Sussex.

*More information is available [here](#).*

### More skills projects benefit from £1 million boost

Nine more projects in Hastings and Rother have benefitted from Government funding designed to support training and boost employability.

The Skills Capital Fund from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), has already helped 11 projects in the area including a digital skills classroom, virtual reality healthcare training and the creation of a community carpentry studio.

Nine of the 23 bids received by East Sussex County Council will now receive a share of the £1 million fund. The projects include the fitting out of a new artist residency studio, the development of two private learning pods, and the purchase of IT equipment to support young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The new projects were chosen by a panel including East Sussex County Council, officers from Rother and Hastings Councils and a representative from the Local Skills Improvement Partnership.

More information is available [here](#).

### Cash boost for active travel

East Sussex is to receive £1.4 million to develop and deliver active travel schemes across the county. East Sussex County Council has secured £1.1 million from Active Travel England's (ATE) Consolidated Active Travel Fund 2025/26, alongside a further award of over £325,000 from ATE's Active Travel Fund 5.

The funding will help develop and deliver schemes which contribute to enabling people to walk, wheel, and cycle as the natural first choice for everyday short journeys or as part of longer journeys in the county. The aim is to improve local connectivity to key services and support people to get more active. This is alongside local active travel scheme development in neighbourhoods and the maintenance of active travel measures.

The funding will help the county council deliver a package of measures to support the key policies included in the recently approved East Sussex Local Transport Plan 4 to ensure the council plans for people and the places where they live, work and do business.

This includes ensuring that designs for streets and places are inclusive, as well as developing healthy and sustainable places which reduce health inequalities and support healthy lifestyles.

More information is available [here](#).

## **Governance Services**

### Greater powers for Sussex come a step closer with government backing for devolution

An opportunity to gain new powers and investment for Sussex has moved a step nearer with the government's agreement to make the area a priority for devolution. Following an expression of interest from the leaders of Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council, ministers have approved proposals to create a mayoral strategic authority for Sussex. This will be comprised of an elected mayor and two members of each constituent authority, with strategic powers for transport, public safety, health, environment and climate change, housing, economic growth, skills and jobs.

Local councils in every part of Sussex would work closely with the mayoral strategic authority and would continue to deliver day-to-day services.

Sussex's upper-tier local authorities agree that devolution could unlock new funding and give people a stronger voice over national decisions which affect them and greater power to steer major projects across the area.

The government will now begin a consultation to seek the views of people and organisations in Sussex.

Alongside devolution, the government is asking for proposals for unitary councils in all parts of Sussex, moving away from the two-tier model of county and borough or district councils where those exist. Discussion with partners will continue on how this might be arranged.

There are no immediate changes to the operation of local authorities in Sussex or the services they provide. The plans for devolution and local government reorganisation do not change the councils' commitment to service delivery for communities across Sussex.

*More information is available [here](#).*

#### Almost £580m to be spent on vital services as budget agreed

East Sussex County Council will spend £579.6 million on vital services after councillors agreed a budget and a Council Plan for 2025/26. At a meeting of the Full Council on 11 February, Councillors voted with a majority of four to approve the proposed budget and Council Plan.

To address the significant funding gap resulting from increased costs and demand for services, as well as long-term reductions in Government funding, the council agreed to use £11.4 million of its limited reserves as well as savings of £13.5 million to set a balanced budget.

Under the approved budget residents will be asked to pay an additional 4.99 per cent in the county council's share of Council Tax, which includes the additional two per cent for adult social care allowed by Government.

This would mean a Band D home would pay an additional £1.70 per week in Council Tax for services including roads, schools, social care and libraries.

Despite the financial pressures, the council continues to make necessary investments in services to meet the needs of local residents.

The council agreed an additional £55 million to its annual spending for East Sussex for 2025/26 to adapt to the growing demand for, and cost of, services, though it is not being funded to match the increased spending.

*More information is available [here](#).*

For your info: **Meetings I attended in February as your County Councillor:**

ESCC 3 x Weekly DCS/ADCS Briefings  
Foster Carer Training Session – Hastings  
Pevensey Parish Council  
ESCC Full Council  
ESCC Cabinet  
ESCC Governance Committee  
Pevensey PC SLR  
Horam Parish Council  
Visit to Military College, Eastbourne  
ESCC Cabinet Briefing  
Military Veterans, Eastbourne  
Herstmonceux Parish Council  
ESCC DCMS Youth Webinar  
Ninfield Parish Council - DNA  
Horam PC SLR  
ESCC Cabinet  
Visit to Uckfield Family Hub  
Warbleton Parish Council



3/3/25