

East Sussex County Councillor Shing
Report to Longman Parish Council Meeting July 2025



Mayor Election Set for Next May

You may already be aware from recent news that the Government has announced plans for a new Mayoral Unitary Authority. As part of this change, the first election for the new Mayor is scheduled to take place in May next year.

This is a significant development in local governance and will have an impact on how key decisions are made across the region. I will share further updates as more information becomes available.

Alfriston 20mph Limit Now in Place

After a long and challenging journey, the implementation of the 20mph speed limit in Alfriston has finally been completed. This significant achievement follows years of campaigning, consultation, and persistent effort by many local stakeholders.

County Highways have invited key stakeholders to take part in a group photo for the official press release marking the completion.

I am delighted with this outcome and would like to take this opportunity to thank Alfriston Parish Council, both current and former councillors, resident groups, and the many residents who provided their views with supported this initiative. In particular, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs June Goodfield for her tireless dedication and advocacy throughout the process.

Exceat Bridge Update

- County Highways are out to tender to seek a contractor, and hope to appoint a contractor by December
- A planning application for a larger site compound has been submitted to SDNPA
- County Highways are continuing negotiations with various landowners
- County Highways don't expect to hear the outcome of the CPO public inquiry until the autumn
- County Highways still anticipate starting construction early in 2026

I have repeatedly called for the proposed new Exceat Bridge to include a safe pedestrian crossing at Seven Sisters Country Park. This is a vital safety measure for both visitors and residents accessing the park.

I understand that the South Downs National Park Authority is currently considering contributing funding towards a visibility study, which would support the County Highways team in assessing the feasibility and design of such a crossing.

I will continue to push for this essential safety feature to be included in the plans.

Polegate 20mph Scheme Update

We recently met with County Highways officials to discuss the proposed 20mph speed limit for Polegate. I'm pleased to report that we have agreed to move forward with the main town centre scheme as a priority.

The request for a wider 20mph zone covering the outer areas will be considered as a second phase, following the completion of the initial implementation.

Linden Court to remain open – with reduced capacity

Following strong feedback from families, carers, and service users, East Sussex County Council has revised its decision on the future of Linden Court Day Centre. The centre will now remain open, though with a reduced daily capacity of 25 adults, reflecting current attendance levels.

Councillor John [Surname], a member of the People Scrutiny Committee, said at the meeting "As someone who supported the call-in of the proposed closure of Linden Court, I wish to sincerely thank all the service users, families, and friends who raised their concerns. I'm pleased that the Council has listened and responded by choosing to retain this vital service."

Financial Impact - The revised plan will deliver partial savings of around £145,000 per year. County Council will need to manage a shortfall of approx. £182,000 in its Adult Social Care and Health budget.

East Sussex County Council 2024/25 Year in Review

East Sussex County Council has published its annual report for 2024/25, outlining how it has continued to deliver essential services, invest in communities, and tackle financial and operational challenges. Despite another difficult year marked by rising demand and limited funding, the Council made progress across a wide range of priorities. This report provides an overview of the Council's key achievements, pressures faced, and the path forward.

Performance at a Glance

- ❖ 72% of Council Plan targets met
- ❖ 91% satisfaction with Early Help services
- ❖ £7 million distributed to support households with essential costs
- ❖ Over 23,000 potholes repaired and 117 road schemes delivered
- ❖ 60 new jobs created via local business support
- ❖ £2.7 million in increased income and debt reduction achieved for residents
- ❖ Carbon emissions 36% lower than in 2019/20
- ❖ Forecast budget gap of £70.8 million by 2028/29

Delivering on Priorities

The Council continued to work toward its four key priorities:

1. Driving sustainable economic growth
2. Keeping vulnerable people safe
3. Helping people help themselves
4. Making best use of resources now and in the future

Despite financial constraints, 43 of the Council's 60 targets were achieved and 6 are awaiting final data. This represents an improvement over the previous year, demonstrating continued commitment to supporting residents and communities.

Financial Overview

Like many local authorities, East Sussex County Council is operating in a very tough financial environment. At the end of the year, the Council reported an overall overspend of £21.9 million. Key cost pressures included:

- Children's Services: especially Early Help and home-to-school transport
- Adult Social Care: overspend of £10 million, driven by increasing complexity of need and demand
- Transport Costs: school transport alone overspent by £3.8 million

To mitigate further pressures, the Council applied tighter controls on recruitment and spending, reduced its capital programme, and drew on reserves. However, this is not a sustainable long-term strategy. A growing budget gap of £70.8 million is forecast by 2028/29, and additional government support may be necessary.

Supporting Vulnerable Residents

The Council remained focused on supporting those in greatest need:

- Child Protection: The number of children with protection plans dropped to 59.8 per 10,000 (better than target).
- Looked After Children: Slightly above target, but overall improving trends.
- Adult Social Care: All waiting time targets met, reflecting better triage and case management.
- Trading Standards: 290 interventions to protect residents from fraud and unsafe goods, including seizure of over £500,000 worth of illegal tobacco and vapes.
- Refugee Services: A new contract will provide 18 more safe accommodation units for domestic abuse survivors.

Helping People Help Themselves

East Sussex residents continued to benefit from programmes that promote independence and self-reliance:

- Early Help Service: 91% of families said the support they received led to positive change.

- Carers Support: 321 carers received short-term crisis interventions. A revised service will now offer more support through increased home visits.
- Financial Inclusion Programme: 170,000 awards made from the Household Support Fund, worth £7 million.
- Debt and Income Support: £2.7 million in income gains and debt reduction achieved for over 3,000 clients.
- Social Enterprise Programme: Launched in April 2025 to build resilience and reduce reliance on formal care services.
- Gambling Harm Prevention: First multi-agency workshop held; workforce training funded and ready to roll out.

Maintaining Roads and Infrastructure

Keeping the county moving and improving transport infrastructure remained a core priority:

- 23,000+ potholes repaired and 117 road schemes completed
- Maintenance on principal and non-principal roads met targets
- However, 31% of unclassified roads require maintenance—above the 25% target
- 350 road signs repaired and 683 markings refreshed
- Additional funding helped improve road condition following storm damage and severe weather events

Investing in Jobs, Education, and Skills

East Sussex continued to invest in economic opportunity and youth development:

- 60 full-time jobs created through local business support
- £382 million spent with local suppliers, 60% of procurement spend
- Over 1,500 students participated in workplace visits
- 400+ young people attended the iCan careers event
- Support for adult numeracy provided to 1,300 people through “Multiply” initiatives
- Attainment challenges remain, especially among disadvantaged and looked after children

Climate and Sustainability

Despite funding cuts, progress continued on the Council’s climate goals:

- 20 energy efficiency schemes delivered in 2024/25
- 36% reduction in carbon emissions compared to 2019/20
- Ongoing support for nearly 2,000 planning applications with environmental advice
- Continued delivery of the East Sussex Climate Emergency Road Map (40% of Council-assigned actions completed)
- Progress on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, due by 2026

Efficient Use of Council Resources

The Council focused on using its resources wisely:

- Office space at County Hall was consolidated, saving £1.05 million
- 163 teams moved to fewer blocks, reducing building use and carbon emissions
- Transition to a new financial and HR system (Oracle Fusion) progressed well, replacing the unsupported SAP system
- Sickness absence increased slightly to 9.21 days per employee, driven by seasonal illnesses and musculoskeletal issues

Preparing for Change and Devolution

East Sussex is preparing for the most significant local government reforms in a generation:

- The Government's Devolution White Paper sets out plans for new Mayoral Combined Authorities
- East Sussex is working with West Sussex and Brighton & Hove on a proposal for a Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA)
- A new structure would come into effect by 2028, with a Sussex Mayor elected in 2026
- The Council has submitted its initial proposals and continues to work with MPs and partners to shape the transition

Lobbying for Fairer Funding

Throughout the year, the Council worked to influence national decisions and secure better funding:

- Responded to key consultations on Local Government Finance Reform
- Highlighted how East Sussex's unique needs (rurality, ageing population, deprivation) are often overlooked in national allocations
- The Leader and Chief Executive met regularly with East Sussex MPs to advocate for residents
- Despite this, the county received no allocation from the new £600 million Recovery Grant

Looking to the Future

The financial pressures facing East Sussex are serious. While the Council continues to make every effort to manage costs, reduce spending, and find efficiencies, the gap between funding and demand is growing.

By 2028/29, the Council forecasts a £70.8 million funding shortfall, with reserves rapidly diminishing. If sustainable long-term funding is not provided, the Council may have to:

- Make further service reductions
- Use its remaining reserves, limiting response to future emergencies
- Seek Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from Government, including possible increases to Council Tax above referendum limits

Despite the challenges, the Council remains committed to being transparent and honest about the choices it faces. It will continue to:

- Focus on supporting the most vulnerable

- Invest in prevention where possible
- Work with partners to improve outcomes for residents
- Maintain strong financial stewardship and public accountability

In Summary

East Sussex County Council has delivered for its communities in a year of great challenge. From fixing roads to supporting carers, helping families in crisis, and reducing emissions, vital work has continued across every service.

As financial and structural reform loom large, the Council's message is clear: with the right funding, local leadership, and shared vision, East Sussex can thrive — but difficult decisions lie ahead.