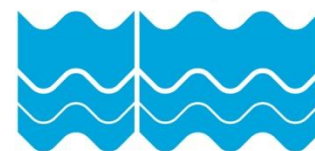


Summary of County Council achievements 2023/24

This summary sets out some of the key achievements of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) in 2023/24 (up to February 2024) under the four strategic priorities of the Council:

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/your-council/about/key-documents/council-plans

The Council Plan for 2024/25 will be on our website from 1st April 2024.



Driving sustainable economic growth

Following a competitive tender process, a **new contract for highways and infrastructure services** with Balfour Beatty Living Places Ltd, began in May 2023. In June 2023, the Council approved additional one-off funding for highways in 2023/24, including £2.5m for carriageway patching work, £3.1m for drainage works and funding for carriageway repairs. Over the first three-quarters of the year, **70 road improvement schemes** were completed, over 19,000 potholes repaired, 132 patch works were completed across 62 sites, around 100 road signs were replaced and around 150 minor drainage schemes were completed.

As part of the Council's **Bus Service Improvement Plan** a number of projects have commenced including the roll-out of reduced price bus tickets, improvements to bus stops including the implementation of QR plates at all bus stops which can be scanned to receive next bus information, £10.5m of conventional bus service improvements to increase the frequency and running times of some services and the Flexibus service which now covers nearly 90% of East Sussex. 10,000 passengers have taken a trip on the Flexibus. In November 2023, a public consultation was launched on the draft **Local Transport Plan**. The plan looks ahead to 2050 and sets out how we will connect people to places through the county by walking, wheeling and cycling, using public transport, traveling by car, or by new ways to travel. In May 2023, the Council was awarded £1.22m from Active Travel England's **Active Travel Fund 4** to support schemes that encourage people to become more active and help reduce carbon emissions.

The **broadband** project eSussex completed its final build in 2023. Together with commercial investment this brings gigabit-capable coverage (1000 Mbps) to 67% across the county, with 98% of premises receiving superfast speeds of >30Mbps. In addition, the Council hosts the new South East Grid (SEG) network, which contributes to the provision of ultra-fast data network connectivity throughout the county.

The Turner Prize exhibition opened at the Towner Gallery in Eastbourne in September 2023 with 1,200 people in attendance. The prize, which was awarded in December 2023, has been instrumental in showcasing the county to a wider audience. In June 2023, the Council-led **Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative** and **Sussex Modern** launched the **Sussex Wine Tourism Plan for Growth** which sets out how the Sussex wine sector could grow from bringing £25m of value to the economy currently to nearly £300m by 2040, creating over 3,600 jobs.

Promoting **employability and skills**, over 1,000 pupils attended Open Doors workplace visits over the first three quarters of the year, supported by Industry Champions to gain experience of a real workplace. 226 Industry Champions were supporting schools and colleges by the end of December 2023. In addition, in October 2023, the East Sussex Careers Hub hosted the online 'What Next?' event connecting young people and their families with careers experts and local employers. The Youth Employability Services was re-commissioned with the new contract, which has a focus on young people Not in Education, Employment or Training, starting in October 2023. Over 1,600 people enrolled on Family Learning Programmes at East Sussex Libraries over the first three-quarters of the year. In addition, since 2019, the Council has committed over £1m from its apprenticeship levy to support local small and medium sized employers take on an apprentice.

Keeping vulnerable people safe

An **inspection of the Council's Children's Services** by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) took place in December 2023. The inspection report published on 6 February 2024, found that the lives of the most vulnerable children in East Sussex are improved by 'consistently strong and effective' support. The help, protection and care children and young people are receiving from the Council earned an overall 'good' rating, while inspectors found the experiences and progress of children in care to be 'outstanding'. This report is set against the context of rising demand for Children's Social Care services and increased complexity of needs. Increases in costs have been particularly acute in looked after children's care costs, in particular external residential costs (with average costs increasing by 13% between quarters 1 and 2) and support for children with the most complex needs.

Following extensive engagement activity with clients, carers and families, the Council published a new **Adult Social Care Strategy** in 2023; 'What Matters to You'. The strategy guides residents' understanding of what adult social care is, outlines six priorities and sets out how these will be taken forward.

The delivery of the **Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme** over summer 2023 was the biggest yet with over 21,000 sessions attended by more than 4,200 young people. 75 providers ran activities at 118 sites reaching more areas of the county than ever before. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) element of the programme also grew with 14 specific SEND providers. Also over the summer, funding was made available to deliver positive activities to support young people with low attendance at primary school during their **transition to secondary school**. 313 young people participated with 86% saying they felt more excited about starting their new school.

Trading Standards were involved in over 1800 interventions over the first three-quarters of 2023/24 to protect vulnerable people, including installing CCTV and call blockers to try to prevent people from falling victim to telephone scams and as part of support sessions and training for vulnerable groups.

As of 31 December 2023, 1,762 guests had arrived in East Sussex under the **Homes for Ukraine** scheme, hosted by 812 sponsors. Over 600 people have subsequently moved into private sector accommodation.

Helping people help themselves

In 2023, the Council opened 11 **Family Hubs**, including in Eastbourne, Lewes, Hailsham, Peacehaven, Uckfield, St Leonards and Hastings. Visitors to the hubs can get support and advice from midwives, health visitors, early communications support workers, early years practitioners and more. Activity sessions give children, parents and carers the chance to socialise and support their children's development. In addition, the Council was successful in securing £7m of Youth Investment Funding to upgrade **youth facilities** in Heathfield and Peacehaven.

Reablement services are provided to help people to regain mobility and daily living skills, especially after a hospital stay. Between April and December 2023 95.1% of people who received short-term services did not request further support and between April and September 2023, 93.5% of older people discharged from hospital to reablement or rehabilitation services were at home 91 days after discharge.

Work continued on the **integration of health and social care** in 2023/24. A joint five-year Sussex Shared Delivery Plan was endorsed in June 2023 by the Council. The plan brings together delivery milestones for 2023/24 and a roadmap for years 2-5. This includes delivery of integrated community teams, operating initially in Hastings.

15 **road safety** schemes were completed during the first three-quarters of 2023/24 to improve road safety infrastructure. Over 3,700 people have also benefitted from 'Bikeability' courses.

In September 2023, ESCC partnered with The Tribe Project, an online platform and app that connects **volunteers** with local opportunities. There are now over 175 roles across the county. The Tribe Project offers volunteers flexible positions accommodating availability, location, and skillset. The Council's External Funding team responded to 220 enquiries over the first three-quarters of the year from the **voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE)**. The team has helped organisations secure £389,361 in funding over the same period.

Annually the Libraries team take part in the Summer Reading Challenge, to encourage children aged 4 to 11 to enjoy the benefits of reading over the summer holidays. This year East Sussex saw its largest uptake since 2018, with 7,198 participants. **Libraries** also provide free computer and internet access, alongside volunteer led 'IT for You' sessions to support people to develop IT skills. So far during 2023/24 over 1,729 adults have participated.

Making best use of resources in the short and long term

The Council's **budget and Council Plan** for 2024/25 were approved at the meeting of Full Council on 6 February 2024. Councillors approved a £538m net revenue budget for 2024/25 with no new cuts to services. The decision not to reduce services was taken despite the rising cost of providing them and funding not keeping pace. In setting a balanced budget, Councillors agreed to use £14.3m of the Council's limited financial reserves to meet the shortfall and to increase council tax by 4.99%.

The Council participated in a Local Government Association (LGA) **Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC)** in June 2023 with the aim of further improving the Council's work. The subsequent independent report found the Council to be well-run and well-managed, open and approachable as well as a trusted and respected partner. The Council was also found to be financially prudent with a good record of financial stability and on the delivery of savings.

Over 2,000 people took part in a **survey on the Council's priorities and spending** from October to December 2023. 70% of people felt the Council's priorities were the right ones, with 60% of people suggesting that highways should be the priority for any additional investment.

The Council has continued to work with partners to deliver carbon reduction and our **climate change** plan. In 2023/24 this has included securing £245k to develop a plan to provide people with the skills to enable the retrofit of domestic properties to reduce their carbon emissions, £4.4m to support the installation of electric vehicle charging points in over 280 locations and nearly £300k of Forestry Commission funding for tree planting projects. Sixteen **energy efficiency** projects were completed on Council buildings during the first three-quarters of the year, including 4 LED lighting projects and 5 solar PV energy generation schemes. Total energy use in quarter 2 of 2023/24 was down 9% on the same period last year and down 25% on the baseline year 2019/20.

The Council spent £307m with 853 **local suppliers** over 2023, equating to 64% of total contract spend. In addition, during the first three-quarters of the year, 11 contracts were awarded which were in-scope of the Social Value Measurement Charter. These contracts had a total value of £4.9m with £1.3m of **social value** commitments secured, including apprenticeships, work experience, creation of local jobs, and local volunteering initiatives. This equates to an outturn of 27% of applicable procurement spend, against a target of 10%.

In September 2023, the **East Sussex Pension Fund** Team won the Governance Award at the Local Authority Pension Fund Investment Awards.