

East Sussex County Council Report to Bexhill Town Council - February 2024 Bexhill Conservative County Councillors Azad, Geary and Hollidge

(Monthly report with website links included for additional information)

Praise for 'strong and effective' support for children in East Sussex

Children's Services at East Sussex County Council have been judged as 'good' overall and 'outstanding' for their work with looked-after children. The Ofsted inspection took place just before Christmas and their final report was published on 6 February. The report praises the 'consistently strong and effective' support given to the most vulnerable children. The dedication and efforts of social workers were also praised. The full report is available to read [here](#).

Communities, Economy and Transport

Campaign calling for more **Foster Carers** highlighted at council meeting

A campaign to encourage more people to consider fostering for their local authority was highlighted at East Sussex County Council's Full Council meeting on 6 February. Councillors received a fostering tool kit containing posters and leaflets about the East Sussex Fostering Service, which they were asked to distribute and display across the county to promote local authority fostering. The fostering recruitment film, entitled 'Any of Us', was also shown at the meeting. The film was produced last year by a partnership of over 80 councils and children's trusts to promote in-house fostering and aims to show that 'any of us' could foster and make a positive difference to a child's life. For more information on fostering with East Sussex County Council and to view the film 'Any of Us', visit the [council's website](#). Online [information sessions](#) about the fostering process are available, as well as in person pop-up events across the county. To know more, visit links above or call 01323 464129. More can be found [here](#) (poster at the end of this report)

British Sign Language interpreting service launched

East Sussex residents can now contact the council using British Sign Language (BSL). The council has launched an initial six-month trial of the BSL interpreting service, SignLive, to ensure more residents can access the help and support they need. SignLive enables people to connect with an interpreter via a video call who will then call the council and relay the conversation between BSL and English. Calling the council using SignLive is free, and the service can be accessed via a desktop computer or laptop with a webcam, microphone and speakers, or via an app on a smartphone or tablet. Residents visiting council offices in Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings will also be able to use SignLive to communicate with staff. More information on SignLive, including how residents can register for the service, is available on the East Sussex County Council [website](#).

Council partnership connects residents with local volunteering opportunities

In September 2023, East Sussex County Council partnered with the Tribe Project, a free online platform and app that connects volunteers with local opportunities. Since its East Sussex launch last year, there are now over 176 roles across the county. Local voluntary action groups, including those in Rother, Hastings, Wealden, Eastbourne and Lewes, are also involved in the partnership and list their live roles on the Tribe website and app.

The Tribe Project offers volunteers flexible positions accommodating, availability, location, and skillset. There is also the opportunity for both short and long-term volunteering opportunities. Find out more about the Tribe Project [here](#).

Call for volunteers to support people preparing for later life

East Sussex County Council's Life Transitions Service is looking for volunteers who can build friendly and trusting relationships and who want to play a part in improving lives. The pilot project aims to help people prepare for significant changes that occur in later life such as retiring, moving home, and changes to health and mobility. Volunteers will need to complete an interactive training programme before they can meet clients in person or online and will receive ongoing support. They will be asked to commit to being a Life Transitions Service volunteer for at least six months and agree to dedicate around half a day a week to the role. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer can find out more information about the role by emailing LifeTransitions@eastsussex.gov.uk or calling 07724 287034.

Local businesses achieve top healthy workplace awards

Two East Sussex businesses have been presented with Gold Wellbeing at Work Awards. Servomex, from Crowborough, and Affinity Select Insurance Services Ltd, from Uckfield, are the first businesses in East Sussex to reach the gold standard in the county council's healthier workplaces programme. The companies were presented with their awards at the second annual Wellbeing at Work Conference and Awards Ceremony in Eastbourne on 8 February. East Sussex County Council's Wellbeing at Work Programme was launched in the autumn of 2021. The scheme provides an accreditation scheme and works with employers to share resources and delivery training to help boost the health and wellbeing of employees. To achieve awards, companies must complete a set of criteria that introduce policies and initiatives which focus on embedding practices that promote and support workplace health and wellbeing. More information about the programme can be found on the East Sussex [Wellbeing at Work website](#).

Progress made on the building of a new Sussex mental health hospital

A 54-bed hospital in Bexhill, called Combe Valley, is set to open next year. It will provide modern, high-quality care for people who may be experiencing serious mental health problems, emotional crises, or severe distress which cannot be treated in the community.

Amnesty for missing library books begins

Residents are being urged to check their homes for overdue books as the East Sussex Library Service launches its annual amnesty. In a bid to recover some of the missing titles, the service will waive fines until the end of March. Books can be returned to any East Sussex library during opening hours – alternatively, most libraries have drop boxes for out of hours returns. Details on the council's [website](#).

Work begins to find 13th-century houses in Eastbourne

Excavation work is set to begin in Manor Gardens in Borough Lane, Eastbourne, to try and find traces of buildings dating back to the 13th century. The work is set to take place near the settlement and stream that gave the town its name and is part of a council-backed project to discover more about the history of Eastbourne.

Governance Services

Budget protecting vital services approved

Details of how vital services will be protected with a £538 million budget were agreed by East Sussex county councillors at a meeting of the Full Council on 6 February. The county council agreed to add more than £50 million to its annual spending for East Sussex in this year's budget to help meet the pressures on services following the impact of Covid and the cost of living. Councillors also agreed that further investment in highways maintenance should be considered when the end of year financial picture was clearer. The [council plan](#), published with the budget, sets out in more detail how services will be provided and how their effectiveness can be monitored.

View the minutes of the Full Council meeting [here](#).

Highways

The state of the roads and highways continues to have its challenges, not just here in East Sussex but across the UK. We have seen the wettest February since 1835 which gives some context to the continued highways challenges.

The Highways budgeted maintenance spending for 23/24 is double 20/21. There is a record 30 gangs currently working on the highways across the county. A record number of potholes have been filled – over 20,000 since the new contractor took over in May. Balfour Beatty filled 2,300 potholes in January alone. New protocols in place re marking temporary patches and focus on sub standard fills. Spray patching will increase as we move into dryer spring (fingers crossed) weather conditions. It is hoped that additional highways funding will be considered separately in June.

We as county councillors recognise the challenges across our divisions in Bexhill and completely share in the concerns and frustrations many continue to feel. But treatment and repairs are improving and will continue to, but there is much more to do.

It is important that residents, businesses and communities formally log on the East Sussex Highways website any damage or pot holes seen on the roads, preferably with photographs as evidence. We as county councillors will continue to log and review with the dedicated highways stewards, but reporting is important for us all to do www.eastsussexhighways.com

Good Luck to those standing in the Kewhurst Town Council by-election 7 March.

If town councillors need to raise any matters or seek further information, as always please let us now. Cllrs Azad, Geary and Hollidge, as always, happy to provide more specific updates or a presentation at a future Town Council meeting, please contact us



2023-24 103

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