

# Public Document Pack

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22 March 2024

Dear Member,

## **County Council - Friday, 22 March 2024**

Please find enclosed the following documents for consideration at the meeting of the County Council on Friday, 22 March 2024 which have been issued since the agenda was published.

| <b>Agenda No</b> | <b>Item</b> |
|------------------|-------------|
|------------------|-------------|

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| <b>4.</b> | <b>Members' Interests</b> (Pages 3 - 4) |
|-----------|---|

List of declared interests.

|           |                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>8.</b> | <b>Appointments</b> (Pages 5 - 8) |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|

Nominations.

|            |                                     |
|------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>15.</b> | <b>Question Time</b> (Pages 9 - 16) |
|------------|-------------------------------------|

Supplementary Question Time report and written questions.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>16(a)</b> | <b>Motion on Property Disposal</b> (Pages 17 - 18) |
|--------------|--|

Briefing note.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>16(b)</b> | <b>Motion on Digital Exclusion</b> (Pages 19 - 24) |
|--------------|--|

Briefing note and proposed amendment by Cllr Pudaloff.

Yours sincerely

Tony Kershaw  
Director of Law and Assurance

**To all members of the County Council**

**County Council 22 March 2024****Agenda Item 4****Declaration of Members' Interests**

Members have declared interests as shown, in the paragraphs specified. Unless otherwise indicated, all the interests are personal but not prejudicial. "DC" = District Council, "BC" = Borough Council, "TC" = Town Council and "PC" = Parish Council.

| <b>Member</b>  | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Nature of Interest</b>                              |
|----------------|--|--|
| Cllr Ali       | 15 – Question Time   | Member of Crawley BC                                   |
| Cllr Ali       | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Member of Crawley BC                                   |
| Cllr Atkins    | 15 – Question Time   | Member of Worthing BC                                  |
| Cllr Burgess   | 15 – Question Time   | Member of Crawley BC                                   |
| Cllr Burrett   | 11 – Pay Policy Statement 2024/25  | Deferred member of the Local Government Pension Scheme |
| Cllr Burrett   | 15 – Question Time, relating to publication of audited accounts                      | Deferred member of the Local Government Pension Scheme |
| Cllr Chowdhury | 15 – Question Time   | Carer and member of Worthing BC                        |
| Cllr Condie    | 15 – Question Time   | Member of Burgess Hill TC                              |
| Cllr Condie    | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Member of Burgess Hill TC                              |
| Cllr Gibson    | 15 – Question Time   | Member of Mid Sussex DC                                |
| Cllr Greenway  | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Member of Arun DC                                      |
| Cllr Greenway  | 16(b) – Notice of Motion on Digital Exclusion  | Member of Arun DC                                      |
| Cllr Lanzer    | 11 – Pay Policy Statement 2024/25  | Deferred member of the Local Government Pension Scheme |
| Cllr Lanzer    | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Member of Crawley BC                                   |
| Cllr Markwell  | 15 – Question Time, relating to provision of Domestic Abuse Housing Support Services | Director of Mate Space Community Interest Company      |
| Cllr McGregor  | 15 – Question Time   | Member of Adur DC, Lancing PC and Sompting PC          |

Agenda Item 4

| <b>Member</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Nature of Interest</b>   |
|---------------|--|---|
| Cllr Milne    | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Horsham DC                |
| Cllr Smith    | 15 – Question Time, relating to Special Education Needs and Disability Ofsted Report | Parent of a child with an Education and Health Care Plan maintained by the County Council |
| Cllr Turley   | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Member of Worthing BC   |
| Cllr Waight   | 16(a) – Notice of Motion on Property Disposal  | Member of Worthing BC   |

## Appointments to Committees – March 2024

(excluding non-Council members)

Proposed changes shown in bold text

### Scrutiny Committees

| Name                                  | No. of members | Members  | Substitutes   |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|--|---|
| Children and Young People’s Services  | 12             | Cllr Baldwin (Vice-Chairman)<br>Cllr Burgess<br>Cllr Cherry<br>Cllr Cornell<br>Cllr Dabell<br>Cllr Evans<br>Cllr Hall<br>Cllr Linehan (Chairman)<br>Cllr McGregor<br>Cllr Mercer<br>Cllr Smith<br><b>Cllr Wickremaratchi</b> | Cllr Chowdhury<br>Cllr Duncton<br>Cllr Lord<br>Cllr Nagel               |
| Communities, Highways and Environment | 12             | Cllr Albury<br>Cllr Baldwin<br>Cllr Britton (Chairman)<br>Cllr N Dennis<br>Cllr Hillier<br>Cllr N Jupp<br>Cllr Kenyon<br>Cllr Kerry-Bedell<br>Cllr Oakley (Vice-Chairman)<br>Cllr Payne<br>Cllr Quinn<br>Cllr Sharp          | Cllr Baxter<br>Cllr Burgess<br>Cllr Cooper<br>Cllr Gibson<br>Cllr Milne |

| Name                         | No. of members | Members   | Substitutes   |
|------------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| Fire & Rescue Service        | 7              | Cllr Bence<br>Cllr Boram (Chairman)<br>Cllr Chowdhury<br>Cllr Duncton<br>Cllr Joy<br>Cllr Patel<br>Cllr Pendleton (Vice-Chairman)   | Cllr Albury<br>Cllr Evans<br>Cllr Oppler<br>Cllr Oxlade               |
| Health and Adult Social Care | 12             | Cllr Ali<br>Cllr Atkins<br>Cllr Cooper (Vice-Chairman)<br>Cllr Dunn<br>Cllr Forbes<br>Cllr Johnson<br>Cllr Nagel<br>Cllr O'Kelly<br>Cllr Patel<br>Cllr Pudaloff<br>Cllr Wall (Chairman)<br>Cllr Walsh   | Cllr Baldwin<br>Cllr Burgess<br>Cllr Joy<br>Cllr McKnight             |
| Performance and Finance      | 15             | Cllr Baldwin<br>Cllr Burrett (Vice-Chairman)<br>Cllr Boram<br><b>Cllr Bradbury</b><br>Cllr Britton<br>Cllr Elkins<br>Cllr Gibson<br><b>Cllr N Jupp</b><br>Cllr Linehan<br>Cllr Lord<br>Cllr McDonald<br>Cllr McKnight<br>Cllr Milne<br>Cllr Turley<br>Cllr Wall | Cllr Baxter<br>Cllr Bence<br>Cllr Johnson<br>Cllr Payne<br>Cllr Walsh |

## Non-executive committees

| Name                                 | No. of members | Members   | Other members   |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| Governance Committee                 | 9              | Cllr Burrett<br>Cllr A Jupp<br>Cllr Lord<br>Cllr Marshall<br><b>Cllr Montyn (Chairman)</b><br>Cllr O’Kelly<br>Cllr Oxlade<br><b>Cllr Sparkes (Vice-Chairman)</b><br>Cllr Waight   | <b>Substitutes:</b><br><br>Cllr Baxter<br><b>Cllr Bradbury</b><br>Cllr Walsh<br><b>Cllr Wickremaratchi</b>  |
| Planning and Rights of Way Committee | 13             | Cllr Atkins (Vice-Chairman)<br>Cllr Burrett (Chairman)<br>Cllr Duncton<br>Cllr Gibson<br>Cllr N Jupp<br>Cllr McDonald<br>Cllr Mercer<br>Cllr Oakley<br>Cllr Patel<br>Cllr Quinn<br>Cllr Wild<br><b>1 Conservative vacancy</b><br>1 Labour vacancy | <b>Substitutes:</b><br><br>Cllr Boram<br>Cllr Cherry<br>Cllr Forbes<br>Cllr Kenyon<br>Cllr Markwell<br>Cllr Sharp<br>Cllr Turley<br>Cllr Wickremaratchi |
| Regulation, Audit and Accounts       | 7              | Cllr Boram (Vice-Chairman)<br><b>Cllr Bradbury</b><br>Cllr Condie (Chairman)<br>Cllr Greenway<br>Cllr Kenyon<br>Cllr McKnight<br>Cllr Wall  | Not applicable  |

| <b>Name</b>         | <b>No. of members</b> | <b>Members</b>  | <b>Other members</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| Standards Committee | 9                     | Cllr Baxter<br>Cllr Burrett<br>Cllr Kenyon<br>Cllr Mercer<br><b>Cllr Montyn (Chairman)</b><br>Cllr Sparkes ( <b>Vice-Chairman</b> )<br>Cllr Walsh<br>Cllr Wickremaratchi<br>Cllr Wild | Not applicable       |

### Informal Panels and Groups

| <b>Name</b>                                | <b>No. of members</b> | <b>Members</b>   | <b>Other members</b> |
|--|-----------------------|--|----------------------|
| Corporate Parenting Panel                  | 7                     | Cllr Burgess<br>Cllr Cooper<br><b>Cllr Dabell</b><br>Cllr Linehan<br>Cllr Lord<br>Cllr Oxlade (Vice-Chairman)<br>Cllr Russell (Chairman) | Not applicable       |
| Foster Panel (North)                       | 1                     | Cllr Payne   | Not applicable       |
| Foster Panel (South East)                  | 1                     | Cllr Smith   | Not applicable       |
| Foster Panel (South West)                  | 1                     | Cllr Oppler  | Not applicable       |
| Additional Foster Panel                    | 1                     | Cllr Hall  | Not applicable       |
| Safeguarding Adults Member Reference Group | 3                     | Cllr Chowdhury<br>Cllr A Jupp<br>Cllr O'Kelly  | Not applicable       |
| Treasury Management Panel                  | 5                     | Cllr Condie<br>Cllr Dunn<br>Cllr J Dennis<br>Cllr Hunt (Chairman)<br><b>1 vacancy</b>  | Not applicable       |



## **Supplementary Cabinet Report: Delivering Our Council Plan 2021-25**

This report sets out the key strategic decisions, policy and programme initiatives, consultations, government announcements and key events within each Cabinet portfolio area to deliver our strategic priorities.

### **Leader – Paul Marshall**

- The Leader has approved the [future governance of economic development partnership arrangements within West Sussex](#), in response to government guidance on the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership functions to local authorities. The County Council will be liaising with a range of partners and the Government over future arrangements. The economy and growth will continue to be a focus for the County Council in line with delivering on the Council Plan priority of ensuring a sustainable and prosperous economy.

### **Community Support, Fire and Rescue – Duncan Crow**

- The Cabinet Member attended a [Chief Archivists in Local Government Group \(CALGG\)](#) event, in Westminster on 5 March, marking the launch of Good Practice [guidance](#) on [record-keepers and care professionals of adopted and care-experienced people in England and Wales](#). The West Sussex Record Office participated in this CALGG project, funded by a grant from the UK National Archives' Network for Change, to provide information to help those seeking knowledge of their family background and birth families.

**Contact Officer:** Helen Kenny, Head of Democratic Services, 033 022 22532, [helen.kenny@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:helen.kenny@westsussex.gov.uk)

### **Background papers**

None

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## West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

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**22 March 2024**

1. Written question from **Cllr Gibson** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Education and Skills**

### Question

The 2024 edition of Planning School Places shows that demand for secondary places in East Grinstead exceeded capacity in four of the last five years.

Published Admission Number (PAN). A school planning area is deemed full when capacity in use exceeds 95%.

| Year | PAN Year 7 | Pupils in Year 7 | Surplus places | % of Capacity in use |
|------|------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 2017 | 540        | 522              | 18             | 97%                  |
| 2018 | 540        | 526              | 14             | 97%                  |
| 2019 | 540        | 549              | -9             | 102%                 |
| 2020 | 540        | 532              | 8              | 99%                  |
| 2021 | 540        | 539              | 1              | 100%                 |
| 2022 | 540        | 557              | -17            | 103%                 |
| 2023 | 540        | 554              | -14            | 103%                 |

The report states that the current provision of places is insufficient to meet the demand within the planning area when in-year admissions are factored in and announces the intention to introduce bulge classes at both Imberhorne and Sackville schools.

| School                      | Year project commenced/ proposed implementation date | Project Type | Additional provision provided/ proposed | New PAN | New Capacity |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------|---|---------|--------------|
| Imberhorne Secondary School | 2024   | Bulge class  | Additional cohort of 30 for 5 years     | n/a     | n/a          |
| Sackville Secondary School  | 2024   | Bulge class  | Additional cohort of 30 for 5 years     | n/a     | n/a          |

The recently announced secondary school place allocations for September 2024 includes a waiting list for places at Imberhorne, confirming the pressures outlined in the report.

On 29 February the Council removed the key decision for the allocation of funding for the bulge classes from the Forward Plan.

- (a) What evidence supports the decision not to proceed with the provision of bulge classes?
- (b) What is the estimated demand for places in future years and how will in-year allocations be handled?

### **Answer**

- (a) When secondary transfer applications were received and assessed in January and February 2024 there were 12 vacancies (one at Imberhorne and 11 at Sackville on the existing combined Published Admission Number of 540). It therefore seemed unnecessary to add extra accommodation. After allocation, there are still 10 places available at Sackville which remain unfilled and can cater for expected in-year admissions. All in-area, on time applications for Imberhorne received a place at allocation. A number of on time, out-of-area children with a sibling at the school also received a place. There is a waiting list for Imberhorne; the majority of children on this live out of county.
- (b) Demand for secondary places is anticipated to peak in 2027/28 although numbers for 2024/25 are lower than anticipated; fresh forecasts for pupil numbers are due to be received in June 2024. It may be necessary to mobilise temporary accommodation in January/February 2025 to manage demand for September 25 entry, but only if it is required.

### **2. Written question from Cllr Pudaloff for reply by Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Education and Skills**

#### **Question**

Following the West Sussex Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspection's findings of inconsistent support for young people transitioning to adult services, 18 to 25, how can the Council and NHS collaborate for smoother transitions, especially regarding mental health needs?

The inspection highlighted long wait times for diagnosis and treatment, impacting those with poor attendance most. Additionally, fragmented occupational/physiotherapy services were identified.

- (a) Can dynamic support registers be improved for smoother council-NHS handoffs, considering mental health needs?
- (b) How can integrated key worker support, including mental health specialists, be expanded to minimise disruption?
- (c) How will wait times, access thresholds, specialist provision gaps (speech & language), and fragmented therapy services in relation to these transitions be addressed?
- (d) What joint efforts can strengthen preparation for adulthood and ensure ongoing support for mental health and additional needs?

## Answer

In response to questions (a) to (c), as these relate to services provided by NHS Sussex, the County Council can advise that these matters will be addressed by NHS Sussex as part of their response to the SEND inspection.

(d) A range of measures are in place including:

- As part of the Adults Improvement Programme, a transitions programme has produced two joint transition protocols setting out the roles and responsibilities of multiple services that support young people as they approach adulthood, which were published in January 2024. The next stage of this project is to improve further the advice and information for young people with mental health support needs. The Transitions Programme will work collaboratively with the Education and Learning Transformation Programme to jointly support the strategic approach to preparation for adulthood so that young people consistently receive the right help and support to lead successful lives.
- A multi-disciplinary transitions panel, which will shortly include representation from the Parent Carer Forum, meets regularly to ensure a smooth transition for those moving from Children's to Adult Services and any ongoing support for mental health and additional needs that may be required.
- In addition, the skills and expertise of Children with Disability (CWD) workers has been developed in preparing young people to transition to adult social care and this is evidenced by 80% of CWD workers reporting better knowledge and capability. Bespoke information and guidance for staff is improving transition specific practice and processes, which includes a focus for mental health and additional needs.
- Thought-Full (Mental Health Support Teams) work in schools attended by over 50% of children and young people aged 5 to 18.
- Development of pathways for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) so that children and young people can access education and achieve their potential.
- WOWSI (Working on Worries Support and Intervention) parent-led CBT approach for parents of primary school aged children to reduce anxiety.
- Web-based Thriving in Education tool to improve access to mental health and emotional wellbeing advice and information, primarily for schools but also parents and other professionals.
- District and borough-based forums exist in some localities between GPs, practice managers and schools to discuss attendance, EBSA, mental health and emotional wellbeing, building understanding between professional groups.

### 3. Written question from **Cllr Smith** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue**

#### Question

With the Household Support Fund ending in September 2024, as announced by The Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget, could you please advise:

- (a) How West Sussex County Council will financially support our most vulnerable residents after this time? Will there be any other local or centrally funded

initiative made available to residents once the Household Support Fund ceases to help them access funds for essential items?

- (b) Will the removal of the Household Support Fund result in any job losses or a need for restructuring within the Communities team?

**Answer**

- (a) Following the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 6 March 2024 regarding the continuation of the Household Support Fund for the period 1 April to 30 September 2024 we are awaiting guidance and fund criteria to be published by the Department of Work & Pensions. This will set out the scope of the approach to be delivered during the next six-month period and may indicate a direction of travel in respect of future policy and subsequent budget allocations.

Future funding by way of dedicated grant allocation is still uncertain. However, the County Council will continue to lobby the Government in collaboration with other local authorities, for the continued provision of support for the most vulnerable residents.

The Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee (CHESC) is scheduled to receive a paper on the Household Support Fund (HSF) at its 14 June 2024 meeting. This will set out the activity delivered in the current full year of HSF Round 4 (2023/24), reflect on outcomes achieved, and consider the approach for HSF Round 5 (1 April to 30 September 2024).

The agenda item will provide CHESC members with the opportunity to contribute as to the future approach to be taken by the County Council.

- (b) No - the County Council has not drawn any administration costs from the Household Support Fund and therefore there are no staff directly paid from these grant funds.

**4. Written question from Cllr Gibson for reply by Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

**Question**

- (a) The joint Surrey County Council/West Sussex County Council A22/A264 Corridor Study missed its announced deadline of the end 2023 for its initial report providing a summary of previous transport studies and options considered for alleviating the traffic congestion at the Felbridge junction and along the A22 London Road. What is the new date for the initial report to be issued?
- (b) The final report for the Corridor Study, including the recommended options, is due to be published at the end of this year. Is this date likely to slip and, if so, what is the new date for its publication?
- (c) The Dukes Head roundabout is a key junction on the A264. The road surface has attracted considerable adverse comment from road users and the need to resurface the carriageway has been accepted by the County Council. Can the

Council confirm that the roundabout will be resurfaced this year and is it able to announce a firm date?

**Answer**

The West Sussex Transport Plan (WSTP) includes improvements to the A22 and A264 corridor as a medium term (2027-32) priority.

West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) has been working jointly with Surrey County Council (SCC) on the A22-A264 East Grinstead to Godstone area corridor feasibility study, which is expected to identify a set of improvements for delivery subject to demonstrating deliverability and value for money. The study is being led by SCC and transport consultants were commissioned to support the study in early autumn 2023.

To date, work has taken place to review previous studies and establish a set of objectives against which options can be appraised. Unfortunately, the study has been delayed due to the departure of the previous project manager. However, a new SCC project lead will begin at the start of April 2024. At the present time, the overall programme for the study is being revised with the aim of minimising any future delays and, if possible, bringing the project back to the original timetable for publication of the final report.

The resurfacing of the A264 Dukes Head roundabout has a permitted programme date of 17 and 18 July and should be completed over two nights. This will of course be subject to operational influences such as weather, resource and materials.

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## County Council 22 March 2024

### Item 16(a) – Notice of Motion from Cllr Milne on Property Disposal

#### Briefing Note

Disposals of land by councils are governed by a duty to obtain the best value consideration. Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 states:

*123. Disposal of land by principal councils (England and Wales)*

- (1) Subject to the following provisions of this section, a principal council may dispose of land held by them in any manner they wish.*
- (2) Except with the consent of the Secretary of State, a council shall not dispose of land under this section, otherwise than by way of a short tenancy, for a consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained.*

A general consent for disposals of land for less than best consideration was issued by the Secretary of State, and allows a local authority, if it wishes, to dispose of land for less than best consideration if it considers the disposal will contribute to the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area and the undervalue is no more than £2m.

The Council has delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property to declare assets surplus and, to the Assistant Director (Property and Assets), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, authority to dispose of property declared surplus and not required by another service of the Council or other appropriate body up to £500,000 in value. Disposal decisions above that value are for the Cabinet Member.

#### **Asset Management Policy and Strategy**

The Council Plan 2021-25 includes as one of its priorities: Making Best Use of Resources. The plan sets out the objective “to maximise the use of our assets by disposing of surplus assets and looking creatively at how we might use our assets to support economic growth”.

The [Asset Management Policy and Strategy](#) 2022/23 to 2025/26 which is aligned to the Council Plan has a key objective to manage, maintain, acquire and dispose of surplus property effectively, efficiently and sustainably, together with optimising financial return. Its objectives include - To ensure an options appraisal of all potentially surplus assets giving due consideration to a range of options including social, community or environmental use, particularly where this could complement the Council’s ambitions relating to climate change where it is viable.

#### **Declaring property surplus to requirements and disposing of property**

When a property or piece of land is no longer required for Council operational use, the asset is declared surplus by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property. All surplus declarations are published as key decisions, are available for scrutiny and the local member is advised if an asset in their division is to be declared surplus.

Once an asset is declared surplus the Property and Assets team will work through the options for the asset in line with Our Objectives as set out in the Asset

Management Policy and Strategy. After the options have been explored a further decision is made on either a sale of the asset (for a capital receipt), let it for a rental income, transfer to the joint venture or to retain it for non-service purposes such as redevelopment for investment, regeneration, or for viable social, community or environmental use, particularly where this could complement the Council's ambitions relating to climate change.

If a decision is made to sell the asset and the value is above £500,000 there will be a second key decision by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, to approve the disposal, once again available for scrutiny and again the local member is advised at an early stage. The asset is marketed to ensure best value consideration through a fair and transparent process and the key decision will be taken following the conclusion of the marketing.

It can be seen from the options appraisal process that a surplus declaration does not mean an asset will automatically be sold, or even allocated to the Joint Venture for development. A decision to transfer an asset to the Joint Venture will be through a second key decision and available for scrutiny (as per the paragraph above). The Joint Venture (JV) is just one of a number of disposal options available and all other options will be considered. An asset will only transfer to the JV if this route is deemed the most beneficial overall.

### **Set out below are some variations to the general process**

In the case of property or assets acquired or designated for highway use, the authority to declare surplus to highway requirements is delegated to the Director of Place Services. Once surplus the property is passed to the Property and Assets team to assess options although in most cases disposal on the market is the most likely outcome for this type of asset.

In most cases of land previously used or held for education purposes, formal written consent to dispose is also required from the Secretary of State for Education. Such consent can impose conditions on the sale.

### **Planning and Local Plans**

Consideration of planning implications or the Local Plans of local planning authorities and matters such as the form of any proposed development would be carried out as part of engagement with the relevant planning authority in accordance with standard planning requirements. This would be the case for any development proposal, whether within the JV or otherwise.

### **Lee Harris**

Director of Place Services

## County Council – 22 March 2024

### Item 16(b) – Notice of Motion from Cllr McGregor on Digital Exclusion

#### Briefing Note

#### Understanding the position

The County Council's Community Safety and Wellbeing Service, within the Communities Directorate, working with Citizens Online has developed an in depth understanding of digital inclusion, access and safety issues and barriers across West Sussex.

From research undertaken by Citizens Online in 2023 it is estimated that:

- 13% (82,953) of adults in West Sussex either do not use the internet or need support to do so.
- Of these, 6% (38,286) are not online. This is higher than the national average which is at around 4%.

From the research, 29% of West Sussex residents told us that local government should support people with digital skills (the second most popular response after friends and family).

In West Sussex digital exclusion disproportionately affects older people, those on low income and those who are disabled.

- Older people - West Sussex residents aged 75+ are much more likely to not use the internet than younger people. Research suggests a lack of digital skills and confidence is a significant barrier stopping many of today's over-75-year-olds going online, alongside the associated costs.
- Those on low income - Residents in West Sussex with lower incomes are more likely to not use the internet. Nationally, those with lower incomes have less skills in the Essential Digital Skills groups, compared to those on higher incomes.
- Those who are disabled - People with a long-term physical or mental health condition, or disability, are less likely to be frequent internet users. Local research for West Sussex mirrors national statistics.

#### Action within the Library Service

Libraries offer the space, equipment and trained staff and volunteers to support residents who are digitally excluded. All libraries offer free access to computers or Wi-Fi for those using their own device. Any resident in need can contact the Library Digital Support service for initial help with digital enquiries, this can be via the helpline 0330 222 3455, email [library.digital.support@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:library.digital.support@westsussex.gov.uk), or by directly visiting a library.

All library staff have been trained to provide in-person help and support, and most libraries also have Digital Volunteers who are able to provide more targeted one-to-one support for individuals in greatest need. The volunteers can offer free support in libraries by appointment, on a range of digital enquiries from setting up an email account, to help with online shopping, or being safe online. Libraries currently respond to over 2,000 enquiries each month for digital support.

## **Digital Safety and support**

In 2023 the West Sussex Staying Safe Online E-newsletter was sent to over 7,000 residents monthly and reshared to an estimated 30,000+ residents via partners. Anyone can sign up to receive the newsletter by visiting [westsussex.gov.uk/staying-safe-online](https://westsussex.gov.uk/staying-safe-online). There were 3,481 people trained and supported by the Digital Safety Team, with 422 professionals trained on digital safeguarding. The Digital Safety Volunteers (formally Digital Ambassadors) delivered a range of digital safety awareness and engagement activity to residents. The volunteers regularly share information via their networks, deliver talks to local community groups and raise awareness by attending and supporting local events.

Alongside this, a Digital Inclusion, Access, and Safety focused website ([westsussex.gov.uk/digitalinclusion](https://westsussex.gov.uk/digitalinclusion)) resource was developed with partners, including a directory of organisations that offer digital skills, data, or devices support. A partnership of key stakeholders was formed, including local government and the voluntary sector, with regular meetings taking place to share ideas, best practice and develop future approaches.

Digital Inclusion Awareness Training has started to be piloted within the county, a key focus of training involves considering alternatives to digital engagement for residents as part of programmes of delivery, projects, and services. A marketing campaign to raise awareness of the digital skills support available is taking place with adverts in local press and in over 80 buses throughout the county. A digital skills and confidence survey has been undertaken across all County Council staff, the findings of which will be used to highlight priorities for internal learning and development.

## **Approach to digital inclusion**

As a result of all this work we are developing a draft Digital Inclusion, Access and Safety strategic approach that will inform the County Council's wider Digital Strategy. The vision for this strategic approach is that everyone in West Sussex can benefit from being online and is able to access and experience safely the wide-ranging opportunities that being online gives them. Everyone in West Sussex should be able to fully participate in our digital society. To achieve this, we will focus on four priorities and state our ambitions and commitments. The four priorities include:

- Making digital inclusion part of the culture.
- Supporting residents to safely access the benefits of the internet.
- Building digital skills, confidence, motivation, and trust.
- Connectivity and access to devices.

## **Digital connectivity**

The delivery of technologies such as gigabit-capable broadband and advanced mobile infrastructure is predominantly a commercial activity. However, the County Council has long recognised the importance that fast and reliable digital infrastructure has on the daily lives of our communities and businesses. We continue to work with government and commercial telecoms suppliers to increase and accelerate the availability of this vital infrastructure. In particular, we continue to target our resources at supporting our hardest to reach and rural communities which are least likely to be the recipient of commercial investment.

Our Better Connected project played a key role in enabling 97% of all premises being able to receive a Superfast connection. Currently 69% of all premises can receive a gigabit-capable connection. The County Council has invested £5m via our West Sussex 'Top-Up' to the UK Gigabit Voucher Scheme resulting in 10,000 premises being able to receive a gigabit-capable connection by the end of 2024.

We have worked with the Government to ensure that West Sussex has been included in the early phases of Project Gigabit which will result in multi-million investment in our digital infrastructure. We will continue to identify new opportunities to improve digital connectivity throughout West Sussex and we have identified opportunities to improve mobile connectivity. For a comprehensive overview of our approach please refer to the Digital Infrastructure Strategy found on these pages: [Gigabit-capable broadband - West Sussex County Council](#).

### **Customer Engagement and Access to Services**

Work is underway to develop a strategy that will set our ambitions for developing and increasing the channels in which we engage with all our customers and deliver services. This will include increasing the offer of accessing our services using digital tools where appropriate and will be underpinned by digital inclusion, access and safety – focusing on improving the customer experience. The draft strategy is expected to be presented to Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee in June.

### **Lee Harris**

Director of Place Services

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## County Council 22 March 2024

### Item 16(b) - Notice of Motion on Tackling Digital Exclusion

#### Amendment by Cllr Pudaloff

This Council notes that there is an ever-increasing use of and reliance on the provision of services via digital media.

It is well recognised that the use of digital technology has brought many benefits. However, it also excludes those who do not have the finance, resources, skills, or devices to engage with digital services, **or those who experience barriers to existing services to address digital exclusion.**

In June 2023 the House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee identified that:

- 2.4m people are still unable to complete a single basic digital task to get online;
- 1.7m households have no broadband or mobile internet access.

The Council recognises that:

- The Council ensures, through the implementation of our digital culture, the availability of non-digital alternatives to access Council services.
- The Council's libraries are helping **some** people engage with digital services.
- The Council has an extensive programme of work to build digital skills, including free access to public computer networks, the provision of free Wi-Fi in public spaces, and through our Digital Ambassador volunteers.

However, the Council recognises that despite this programme of support, many residents continue to be digitally excluded. Furthermore, digital exclusion goes much further than engagement with the services of West Sussex County Council. We need to be supporting our residents regarding all the effects of digital exclusion.

In recognition of this digital divide, the Council commits to increasing its work to ensure that residents are not digitally excluded within the county. The Council requests that the Chief Executive and Leader:

- (1) Ensure that the County Council is best able to identify residents and particular groups of residents who are most at risk of being digitally excluded due to lack of finance, resources, skills or devices, **and other barriers to existing services to address digital exclusion.**
- (2) Work with those groups to find the most effective ways of improving digital inclusion, recognising those ways will be different, depending on the reasons for the lack of digital inclusion, **which can include a lack of transport or lack of opening hours for Council facilities.**
- (3) Strengthen working with all tiers of local government and the voluntary sector to address digital exclusion **to provide long term and**

***sustainable funding for targeted schemes for those experiencing digital exclusion.***

- (4) Target appropriate ***resident engagement and*** publicity measures to raise awareness of the alternatives to digital engagement with the Council, for those residents for whom using digital channels is not a viable option.
- (5) ***Ensure that, as with other aspects of equality, an assessment of digital inclusion/exclusion is an integral part of every project from the County Council.***