

East Sussex: Our funding gap



Have your say on the Steps to Work service

East Sussex County Council is facing a financial gap of £55 million next year.

Most local authorities are experiencing similar cost pressures at the moment.

Despite these pressures, we have a legal responsibility to set a balanced budget.

That means we need to make some difficult decisions about what we spend.

Every part of the Council will need to find savings to help close the gap.

Cabinet considered some of the savings proposals in September.

Any proposed changes that affect services will have a public consultation.

This is one of the Adult Social Care and Health consultations.

The consultations start on 3 October 2024 and close on 28 November 2024.

Decisions are expected to be made on the proposals in February 2025.

Services will continue as normal while we are consulting on the proposals.

This consultation is about our proposal to close the Steps to Work service.

Read on to find out more or visit our website:

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/funding-gap-asch

Background information

Our funding gap

East Sussex County Council (the Council) has a net budget of £538.1 million for the year from April 2024 to March 2025. Our net budget is the money we have to spend which is financed by business rates, council tax receipts and the revenue support grant we get from the national government.

We expect our net budget for next year to be a similar amount. This means that we are facing a financial gap of £55 million for 2025/26. The financial gap is the difference between the funding available and the cost of keeping services at their present level.

Most local authorities are facing similar pressures. We face this gap even though we are a well-run and efficient council which has saved £140 million since 2010 and found new ways to work effectively through difficult times. Unfortunately, the cost pressures we face now are so great that efficiency alone is not enough and the limited reserves of money we have available would not be enough to meet the financial gap. Most importantly, reserves can only be spent once and could not repeatedly fill the financial gap which councils face every year. It is also not possible to close the whole gap by raising council tax as the increase that would be required is beyond the limit set by national Government.

We are legally obliged to close the financial gap and balance our budget. This means that some tough decisions will have to be made and reduced services are possible in all areas. When making these decisions, our priority will be to maintain protection and support, wherever possible, for the most vulnerable people in our community.

There is more information about why we have to make savings and what we are doing to highlight the issues local authorities face with the national Government on our website at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/your-council/finance/east-sussex-our-funding-gap

Social care support

Adult Social Care and Health is a department of East Sussex County Council. We work with people aged 18 and over who live in East Sussex. We help people live healthy and independent lives, whatever that may look like for them. We look at people's strengths, capabilities, support network, community and difficulties and work with them to find solutions.

The Council has a legal duty to provide social care support to those who are eligible. About three quarters of the East Sussex budget goes on providing social care for children and adults, with adult social care accounting for nearly half of the budget (48%). Care and support for adults is not free and we charge for most of our services. The amount people pay depends on their financial situation, but most people have to pay something towards their care, with the remaining costs paid for by the Council.

Nationally, social care is under pressure due to a combination of demographic, financial, and systemic factors. East Sussex is no stranger to this, facing unique challenges which impact on the need for support and services in the county. Around 25% of the East Sussex population is over 65 compared to a national figure of 18%, average wages remain lower than the national average, and 30,000 people in the county are living in some of the most deprived areas of England. We have also seen a 40% increase in the average weekly cost of providing care in East Sussex since 2020

As people live longer, they may require care and support for longer, and their care and support needs are likely to become more complex over time. There is also evidence that the cost of living challenges have increased demand for care, as well as making people less able to afford their contribution towards the cost of care.

As social care is such a large part of the Council's budget, we will need to make savings to services in this area too. Reduced services are likely, and we will need to review staff numbers, but the amount we need to save can't be achieved through reducing the workforce alone.

Developing the savings proposals

Given the financial gap we are facing, we know it is impossible to avoid some of our residents being negatively affected by the difficult decisions that we need to make. We have tried our best to identify proposed savings that would have the least possible impact on people's care and wellbeing.

We know too that many of our external partners in the NHS, local authorities, providers and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) are experiencing their own pressures in terms of demand for services and funding challenges. Where we can, we've tried to take that into account in looking for savings.

Our priority in Adult Social Care and Health is to meet our legal duties under the Care Act. To help us to do this, we have identified funding areas that we think need to be protected when we are looking at savings options.

The priority funding areas are:

- **Community care budget:** This budget covers the cost of care that is provided to adults who are eligible for social care support because of a disability or health condition. This budget is already under pressure because more people need our help, the cost of providing care is increasing, and our residents are increasingly struggling to pay their contribution towards the cost of care.
- **Carers:** As well as protecting the budget for community care which funds support for people who are eligible for social care support, we have tried to protect the direct support we provide to unpaid carers who are looking after their family members and friends. This is because carers play an invaluable role in meeting care and support needs for so many residents and reduce the amount of support residents need from other services.
- **Voluntary and community sector (VCSE):** These organisations make a huge contribution to preventing, reducing and delaying the need for care and support from the community care budget. For this reason, we want to protect the funding that we provide to support this sector as far as possible, particularly where we can demonstrate that services are supporting our statutory duties and other priority funding areas.
- **Frontline workers:** We need to ensure we have enough social work staff and occupational therapy workers to carry out assessments and put care and support in place. We also need to retain enough financial assessment staff to ensure we are funding those who are most in need and that people pay the correct contribution.
- **Care market:** We need to ensure we have enough staff so that we can support the care market and ensure we have a good supply of services that deliver the best value.

Consulting on the savings proposals

There are no easy choices and we know that some residents will be very worried about how they and their loved ones might be affected. We are committed to consulting with you on these difficult decisions and providing as much information about their potential impact as we can to support decision making.

There are 11 savings proposals for Adult Social Care and Health that affect services. We are consulting with the public about all of these. As well as these savings, we are also looking at other funding, staffing and income generation opportunities.

This consultation is about our proposal to close the Steps to Work service, which supports people with a learning disability and/or Autistic people to find employment. You can find out more about the other consultations and take part by visiting our website: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/funding-gap-asch

A Government Budget is planned during the consultation period on 30 October 2024. If any Budget announcements affect these proposals, then that will be taken into account during the decision making process next year.

Consultation overview: Steps to Work

How the service works now

Steps to Work is run by the Council and employs 12 members of staff when fully staffed, although there are currently some vacancies. The service provides accredited training to prepare clients for work and supports them to find and retain employment by matching them with job coaches.

People accessing Steps to Work can complete a 16-week training programme prior to getting support with job seeking, or they can access job seeking support without the training element. They receive weekly support until they have found a job and once they have found employment the service will support them to settle in and retain the job for up to six months.

The service works with local employers to build relationships and identify employment opportunities. It also runs the Shine car wash service at the Council's County Hall building in Lewes. Shine offers work experience and a range of transferable skills with the aim of helping people transition into paid employment.

People are referred to the service by the care management teams in adult social care. The criteria for accessing the service are that people must be aged 18+ with a learning disability and/or an Autism diagnosis.

There are currently 61 clients using the service. Of these, 31 are either training or actively job seeking, while the rest are either due to start work soon or are already in employment with light touch support.

There are several supported employment services run by other providers in East Sussex, including Little Gate, Chalk Farm, Aspens and Parchment Trust. Steps to Work is the only one that works on a county-wide basis.

What we are proposing to change

We are proposing to close the Steps to Work service from April 2025. This would include closing the Shine car wash service around the same time.

Steps to Work clients already in paid or unpaid work would be able to carry on in their roles, although they would no longer receive support from the service to maintain their employment. Most of the volunteers working at the Shine service have other employment as well, which they would be able to continue with.

Alternative pre-employment training or employment support services could be found from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or the voluntary and community sector in future. DWP provides employment support and job coaches, while voluntary and community sector provision across the county includes Little Gate, Chalk Farm, Aspens and Parchment Trust. Clients with particular support needs may also be able to meet these in different ways such as through support from a Personal Assistant to maintain their employment. Our care management teams in adult social care would help people to access services as part of support planning.

Why we are proposing this saving

While we recognise the importance of these services, the budget pressures we face mean that we have to make difficult decisions about how we spend our money.

There are other organisations offering supported employment services to people with a learning disability and/or Autism. Given the financial pressures we face, it is difficult to justify continuing to run this service when alternatives exist.

How people and organisations would be affected

People currently using the service who haven't already found employment would need to move to a new employment support service. This could be worrying and stressful for people and their families. Depending on where people live it may be harder to find them alternative services in the independent sector, as most of the services are based in the east of the county.

There would be a risk that people with a learning disability and/or Autistic people may find it harder to get and keep jobs in future. This risks them becoming de-skilled and isolated. They may also end up needing more support from other services, such as day services.

The family and carers of clients would be affected by the change too. They would need to support the person through the transition and if alternative services can't be found it may affect their ability to have a break from their caring role or to maintain their own employment.

Have your say on the proposal

We are keen to hear from everyone with an interest, including:

- people who have used the services or whose family members or friends have,
- providers who run the services and the staff who work for the services,
- staff and organisations who work with the services or refer people to them,
- providers who support people who use the services, and
- our partners in the public and voluntary sectors who work with the services and would be affected by the proposed changes.

How you can take part

The consultation closes on 28 November 2024. Please note that if we receive any consultation responses after this date, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to take them into account.

You can fill in the survey online or request a paper copy by emailing or calling (see the 'how to get in touch with us' box later for details). The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete.

We can accept consultation responses via letter and email if you aren't able to fill in the survey. These are a little harder to keep track of and analyse, so it would help us if you can use the survey if you are able to.

If you need the survey in another format or language, please get in touch with us.

COMPLETE ME ONLINE

Use your phone or tablet to scan the QR code

Visit our website at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/funding-gap-asch



Steps to Work staff will support people to take part in the consultation if needed and our advocacy provider POhWER will also be available to help if needed. Information about these opportunities will be shared directly with those who are affected by the proposal.

How organisations can take part

Official responses from organisations should be submitted by email or post (see below for contact details). Individual staff wanting to take part should fill in the survey.

What happens next?

Decisions about whether we go ahead with the savings proposals are expected to be made by Councillors in February 2025. This means there won't be any changes to services before that date. Anyone currently using the services can continue to do so in the normal way and the services can continue to accept new clients.

Councillors will consider the results of the consultation alongside a report that sets out what we are proposing to do next and an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). An EqIA is a tool we use to understand how particular groups and communities would be affected by a proposed change. The papers, including the EqIA, will be available to the public on our website in advance of the meeting.

The time frame for any changes to services would reflect the legal and contractual requirements for the service in question and we would work closely with those people and organisations who would be affected.

How to get in touch with us

Questions about the consultation or your services

You can talk to the manager of the service, Kayleigh Curd, or you can contact her by email or telephone:

Email: Stepstowork.asch@eastsussex.gov.uk Telephone: 01323 464 492

Submitting a consultation response

Your survey can be emailed, posted or hand to us. If you aren't able to complete the survey you can submit your response by email or letter.

Email: consultationASC@eastsussex.gov.uk

Post: Funding Gap Consultations, North A Floor, County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, BN7 1UE

By hand: Give your survey to a member of staff at the service

The questionnaire

This survey is anonymous and we don't ask you to provide any personal information. There is an optional 'about you' section at the end. Please ensure that any comments you make don't include any names or personal details of you or anyone else. You can find our privacy notice about how the data will be stored and processed by East Sussex County Council on our website:

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/privacy/funding-gap-consultations-dps

Q1) Are you completing the survey as: (Please tick one box)

- Someone who uses/has used the Steps to Work service including Shine
- The family or carer of someone who uses/has used the Steps to Work service including Shine
- Someone who works for the Steps to Work service
- Someone who lives in East Sussex
- Someone who works in health or social care in East Sussex
- Someone who works in housing in East Sussex
- Someone who works in the voluntary or community sector
- Other (please provide details below)

If you ticked 'other' please provide details here:

To submit an official response from an organisation, such as from the board, senior leaders or heads of service, please provide it by email or letter, rather than completing the survey. Individual members of staff should fill in the survey as normal.

Q2a) How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close the Steps to Work service, including Shine, and offer people employment support from the independent sector instead?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not sure

Q2b) Please use the box below to tell us why you agree or disagree:

Q3) How would the proposal to close Steps to Work affect you or someone you care for? What you tell us will help us carry out an equality impact assessment.

Q4) Do you have any other suggestions or comments you would like to make?

- Yes (use the box below for your comments)
- No

Thank you for taking part in the consultation. If you would like to, please fill in the optional ‘about you’ section on the next pages.

**Post your completed survey to: Funding Gap Consultations, North A Floor,
County Hall, St Anne’s Crescent, Lewes, BN7 1UE**

About You: Equalities Monitoring Form

We want to make sure that everyone is treated fairly and equally and that no one gets left out. That's why we ask you these questions. Your data is important to us, and we won't share the information you provide with anyone else. Your information will only be used and reported anonymously to support the activity you have completed the 'About You' survey for.

You do not have to answer these questions but by doing so you are helping to ensure our services effectively meet the needs of all our service users.

Full privacy notice: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/privacy/about-you

1. What age are you?

..... years

Prefer not to say

2. What is your gender?

Female

Male

Non-binary

Prefer to self-describe, please write in:

Prefer not to say

3. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

Yes

No, write in gender identity:

Prefer not to say

4. What is your ethnic group?

White

English/Welsh/Scottish /Northern Irish/British

Irish

Gypsy / Irish Traveller

Roma

Any other White background, write in:
.....

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups

White & Black Caribbean

White & Black African

White & Asian

Any other Mixed or Multiple background, write in:
.....

Asian or Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Any other Asian background, write in:
.....

Black, Black British, Caribbean or African

Caribbean

African background, write in

Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background, write in:
.....

Other ethnic group

Arab

Any other ethnic group, write in:
.....

Prefer not to say

5. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- 'Straight' / Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Prefer to self-describe, please write in:
- Prefer not to say

6. What is your religion or belief?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> No religion<input type="checkbox"/> Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)<input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist<input type="checkbox"/> Hindu<input type="checkbox"/> Jewish<input type="checkbox"/> Muslim<input type="checkbox"/> Sikh | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Any other religion, write in:
.....<input type="checkbox"/> Philosophical belief, write in
.....<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
|--|---|

7a. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No (go to question 8)
- Prefer not to say (go to question 8)

7b. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little
- Not at all
- Prefer not to say

7c. If 'yes', please state the condition or illness. If you have more than one please tick all that apply. If none apply, please mark 'Other' and write an answer in.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Physical Impairment<input type="checkbox"/> Sensory Impairment<input type="checkbox"/> Learning Disability/Difficulty<input type="checkbox"/> Long-standing illness<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Neurodivergent condition<input type="checkbox"/> Other Developmental condition<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please write in)
.....<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
|--|--|

8. Are you currently pregnant or did you give birth in the last twelve months?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

9a. Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?

- Yes (go to question 9b)
- No (go to question 10a)
- Prefer not to say (go to question 10a)

9b. If yes, for how many hours a week?

- 9 hours a week or less
- 10 to 19 hours a week
- 20 to 34 hours a week
- 35 to 49 hours a week
- 50 hours or more a week
- Prefer not to say

9c. If yes, do you care for a.....?

- Parent
- Partner/spouse
- Child with special needs
- Other family member
- Friend
- Other (please give details)
- Prefer not to say

10a. Armed Forces Service: Are you currently serving, or have you previously served in the UK Armed Forces (this includes Reservists or part-time service)?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

10b. Are you in a household or family where someone is currently or was previously serving in the UK Armed Forces?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

11. Please tell us your postcode

-
- Prefer not to say