

ESCC report to Etchingam Parish Council on 19th October 2023

Robotic pets bring comfort to dementia sufferers

A mechanical pet project to help people with early-stage dementia has been launched in East Sussex. The county council's RoboPets scheme aims to support clients living with the early stages of the condition by giving them a robotic cat or dog which acts as a positive distraction for them. The automated pets help with anxiety and ease the pressure felt by carers by providing companionship.

Since the project's launch in April, 50 companion pets have been homed across the county, with carers seeing positive health and wellbeing benefits for the people they care for. When the project ends in April 2024, the council will evaluate the benefits of the pilot scheme to establish whether the pets should be made more widely available to eligible residents across East Sussex.

More information about dementia support in East Sussex is available [here](#).

Details about local dementia services can be found on the [East Sussex 1Space website](#).

New film highlights need for more foster carers

A powerful new film released on 26 September highlights the difference fostering can make. 'Any of Us' is the sixth film produced by a growing partnership of councils and children's trusts to promote local authority fostering. The film follows three people from different walks of life, who deal with everyday situations and realise that they have the skills to become a foster carer and make a difference.

Help and advice is available to East Sussex County Council foster carers day or night, and every foster carer has a dedicated social worker who is locally based in East Sussex. An additional 24-7 telephone helpline is also available.

For more information on fostering with East Sussex County Council and to view the film 'Any of Us', visit the [ESCC website](#).

East Sussex County Council approves use of funding to support vulnerable households

At a meeting on 15 September 2023, the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health agreed to approve the use of £2,000,568 from Round 4 of the Household Support Fund to provide support to pensioners, households with a disabled person and other vulnerable households between 1 October 2023 and 31 March 2024.

The scheme provides a further opportunity to extend the support to vulnerable households within East Sussex who are experiencing financial challenges.

App and online platform to boost volunteering efforts

A new app and online platform designed to make it easier for people to volunteer has been officially launched by East Sussex County Council. The Tribe app was unveiled to voluntary

organisations in the final week of September, with demonstrations by developer Bronze Labs.

The app enables those interested in volunteering to find opportunities with local groups and organisations. Voluntary organisations will also be able to use Tribe to manage and schedule their volunteer tasks and find new local volunteers. Rother Voluntary Action (RVA), Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) and Wealden, Eastbourne, and Lewes Voluntary Action (3VA) are working alongside Bronze Labs to assist voluntary organisations in using Tribe, and to get their volunteering opportunities included.

Find out more about the Tribe project and download the app [here](#).

Eastbourne gallery exhibits the Turner Prize

On the 28th of September, one of the world's most prestigious art awards opened to the public in Eastbourne. The Towner gallery is hosting the finalists in the Turner Art Prize for the next 6 months to mark its centenary. The Turner Prize is the biggest contemporary art prize in the world, and only goes to one venue each year.

More information about the art on show is available on the gallery's [website](#).

Tree funding boost to council's environmental efforts

Funding from the national Local Authority Treescapes Fund will see more trees planted across the county as the council continues its efforts to address the climate emergency. Nearly £300,000 of funding from the Forestry Commission has been awarded to the county council, following a successful joint bid with Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council for tree planting projects.

The project will include the planting of up to 20,000 trees on the downland fringes between Eastbourne and East Dean and the planting of a number of trees in Chailey parish. It will be delivered over two years, beginning at the start of this winter, and will allow three years of maintenance to ensure the successful establishment of the trees.

The grant brings the total amount secured by the county council from the Treescapes Fund over the last three years to nearly £900,000.

More information about the actions taken by East Sussex County Council to reduce its carbon footprint can be found on the council's [website](#).

Highway improvement programme gives county roads a new lease of life

Roads across East Sussex have been given a new lease of life thanks to an annual highways improvement programme.

Surface dressing has been carried out on 17 sites this year, extending the life of almost 30km of road by up to 10 years at a fraction of the cost of removing and replacing the road surface. An additional surface seal was applied to eight of the surface dressing sites where stress is caused due to turning vehicles or higher vehicle speeds. This will further strengthen the roads and help prevent defects, cracks, and potholes from forming.

More information on work taking place across East Sussex is available [here](#).

Health officials urge eligible residents to book covid and winter flu vaccinations

Health officials in the region are urging those eligible for their covid and winter flu vaccinations to book their appointments. The jobs are currently being offered to the over 65s and those who are clinically vulnerable.

This story was reported nationally. More information can be found [here](#).

Council receives positive feedback from Peer Review

East Sussex County Council has received a strong vote of confidence following a recent independent peer review.

The council participated in a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) with the aim of further improving the council's work.

The review, which is offered to all local authorities by the Local Government Association (LGA), took place in June 2023 and included a three-day site visit.

The independent CPC report published last week found East Sussex County Council (ESCC) 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.

The report noted that it was clear from the interviews conducted that 'the organisation does what it says it will do and does it well', with the review team finding a strong track record of delivery across all key service areas.

Cllr Keith Glazier, leader of East Sussex County Council, said: "I am delighted that the peer review report has praised our partnership working and highlighted how much our staff value working for East Sussex.

"We are all aware of current financial climate and it is therefore extremely reassuring, that the CPC team has found the council's finances to be carefully managed with robust procedures in place.

"The review team found us to be a well-managed, inclusive authority and I am proud to lead such an organisation."

The CPC team highlighted areas where further improvements could be achieved and has made eight broad recommendations to the local authority.

Cllr Glazier added: "Of course there is always room for improvement, and we welcome the recommendations in the review report. We will work hard to continue to deliver improvements that benefit the whole of East Sussex."

The council has drafted an action plan to address the recommendations which include developing the council's existing strong partnerships, increasing diversity in the organisation, sharing the council's successes more widely, and continuing to act on the future of office spaces reflecting the move to hybrid working.

Becky Shaw, the council's Chief Executive, said: "It is really important we welcome the learning and the thoughtful provocation that the peer review has given us.

"The review offered a timely opportunity to check in on our progress over the recent challenging years and it has provided an important external perspective on how we have been approaching future challenges.

"I am particularly delighted the peer team has highlighted the many examples of staff excellence at ESCC which is testament to the dedication shown by, and quality of, our workforce."

CPCs are offered to all local authorities by the LGA once every five years and the reviews involve leading councillors and senior officers from other councils across the country.

The team who visited East Sussex were: Dr Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire County Council; Cllr Simon Geraghty, Leader of Worcestershire County Council; Matti Raudsepp, Director of Customer, Arts & Property, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council; Julie Greaves, Head of Sustainability, Hertfordshire County Council; Angela Kawa, LGA; and Sophie Kitching, Warwickshire County Council.

The process includes a six-month check-in session with the LGA which will provide an opportunity for the council to update peers on progress against the action plan and to discuss next steps.

The CPC Final Feedback Report can be found online at <https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/documents/s53015/CPC%20Final%20Feedback%20Report%202023%20-%20Appendix%201.pdf>, and the council's response to the recommendations can be viewed at <https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/documents/s53016/Appendix%202.pdf>.