

Kent County Councillor Annual Report to Parishes 2025

We have had a year which has been shaped by challenging external factors both political and financial for local government but despite that Kent County Council has continued to deliver frontline services and to remain financially stable (unlike some Councils). Inflation, reduced settlements from Central Government and changes to National Insurance requirements together with continuing increased demand on services have created financial pressures and meant some difficult decisions but KCC remains **financially sustainable**.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation have been a focus for the past few months, with KCC not included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) but still being required to plan for Local Government Reorganisation (the creation of Unitary Councils and both KCC and DDC disappearing) on the original timetable with the first submission being made in March this year, a. A more detailed submission will be required in November 2025.

Roads and highways remain the issue that appears most frequently in emails and enquiries from residents and from Parish Councils. I have reported to Parishes through the year on our continued efforts to maintain the roads with a budget that is much less than needed. We have carried out 'pothole blitzes' with additional contractors when funds have been made available as well as planned resurfacing and maintenance, the level of planned maintenance we can carry out is less than ideal and that is simply because capital funding does not allow more. The website reporting tool continues to be the most effective way to report potholes and other defects in the highway. I have raised issues from residents around flooding which because of changes in weather patterns are becoming more frequent and severe, the majority of the drainage system was put in place some time ago and is not always able to deal with the deluges we now get more frequently. I do raise maintenance and drain clearing issues regularly with the District Manager.

The frequency of utility works on our roads has increased and the past year has, I am very aware, seen significant disruption to our villages. I have picked up issues over signage, diversion routes and extended work times. Last month KCC were one of three authorities invited to give evidence to the **Transport Select Committee** of Government around this issue as a result of work done in the Council and representations made to Ministers.

Whilst **Highway Improvement Plans** have their limitations, I have tried to help Parish Councils make the best use of them and supported meetings to address the issues that are important, notably speeding on our roads. It's been great to see our local PCs taking action on some routes.

Our Adult and Children's social services continue to take over 50% of our available budget (36% for adults) and this year we have again regrettably had to add an additional amount of just under 2% to our Council Tax which is ringfenced for social care to help meet that cost.

KCC continues to use **new technology** to help residents stay at home longer or to return home from hospital, but we all know that it is people to care that make the difference and that is becoming increasingly expensive and harder to find.

Our children's services remain outstanding, with our own fostering service and training and development schemes for children's social workers being successful. Our Family Hubs are now in place across Kent to offer targeted prevention and intervention at an early stage for families.

In line with the practical, proportionate approach to **environmental issues** in the last year KCC has continued to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our own estate, the record of sending less than 1% of waste to landfill has continued. **Plan Bee** and **Plan Tree** go from strength to strength, tree planting under Plan Tree took place in Ash this year.

The Making Space for Nature draft plan (Local Nature Recovery Strategy) has been published and consulted on earlier this year.

The support for vulnerable residents continued through the **Household Support Fund** and the KCC **Financial Hardship Programme** and this winter the focus was on residents just missing out on Pension Credits and losing the Winter Fuel Allowance as well as continuing to support families entitled to free school meals with food vouchers through the school holidays.

The network of libraries continues to offer far more than books, they are also community hubs, offering story time for small children, summer reading challenges, help with IT and various clubs, the mobile library service continues.

I have continued during the past year to answer queries from residents which span across all KCC services, to support residents in school and transport appeals. I attend Parish Council Meetings where possible, and I am always grateful for the welcome and the opportunity to update Councillors on KCC matters.

Sue Chandler

KCC Member for Sandwich and the Villages

April 2025