

2021/22 Annual Report from Susan Carey Member for Elham Valley, Kent County Council for Sellindge Annual Meeting

I am pleased to report that Kent returned a Conservative majority in the Kent County Council elections on 06 May 2021 (60 Conservatives out of 80 places). Our own election here in Elham Valley was postponed until 17 June following the sudden death of the Labour candidate. I was re-elected on this date with just over half the votes cast. My thanks to all those who voted.

The last year has continued to be dominated by Covid-19 and its effects on our health and economy. KCC has worked closely with the NHS, the district councils, the voluntary sector and other partners on measures to encourage vaccination uptake, testing for Covid, tracking contacts, supporting the vulnerable and offering help where needed. **KentTogether** is our 24/7 online and telephone service where people can turn to for help and **Release the Pressure** is our long-standing helpline for those facing stress.

As we have emerged from Covid-19 restrictions there has been a surge in demand for social care and for Special Education Needs assessments. This has placed considerable financial pressures on KCC's budget and has meant we have had to reduce some of our discretionary services such as the level of subsidy for the Kent Travel Saver (although those on low incomes are unaffected) and subsidies for uneconomic bus services.

At KCC I have a particular responsibility for our Environment work and am pleased to report that many of the projects I have been leading have had the added benefit of reducing costs by reducing energy use. In March 2021 KCC won a major grant from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for projects that had to be delivered by April 2022. The most significant of these was the purchase of a 21MW solar park which will reduce our energy use by 30% and also reduce our annual energy costs by around £760,000 a year for the next 40 years.

KCC's Plan Tree Strategy has just finished its public consultation. Plan Tree proposes the establishment of an extra 1.5 million trees in Kent and as part of this each KCC Member will be allocated trees for their own division. I'd be very pleased to hear from people with ideas for suitable sites here in Sellindge Parish.

My Environment brief also covers waste disposal – the 12 district councils in Kent collect the waste, KCC disposes of the collected waste and runs the Household Waste Recycling Centres. KCC has been able to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill to just 0.2% (this is asbestos which must by law be deep buried). What can't be recycled is turned into energy at an incinerator in Allington, Kent. Last year we held a consultation on whether to keep the booking system for the HWRCs that was introduced during Covid-19. There was a clear margin in favour of keeping the booking system (available both online and at our call centre 03000 41 73 73) and by the end of April same day

bookings were introduced at all 18 HWRCs. Recycling rates are up at our HWRCs and a 19th HWRC opened in Allington on 09 May.

The disruption to our local road network and people's lives whenever there are delays to Cross Channel traffic has become intolerable particularly through Sellindge. KCC does not control the ports or the motorways but Kent Highways is part of the Kent Resilience Forum together with National Highways, Kent Police and other public sector partners. We continue to lobby the Government on this as it is a national problem requiring a national response.

A similar issue is that of the continued high level of illegal entries into Kent by those seeking asylum. Adults and families are dispersed around the country but other local authorities must volunteer to take any under 18 year olds who arrive on their own. This has led to unsustainable burdens on KCC in dealing with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and twice in the last year we have had to declare we were unable to safely accept any more meaning we were in breach of our statutory duty. This has led to a temporary compulsory dispersal scheme to other local authorities around the country. This does not resolve the underlying problem but has relieved some of the immediate burden for Kent.

The invasion of Ukraine in February has been another crisis where local government has been expected to respond swiftly. Information for both Kent residents and Ukrainian refugees can be found at www.kent.gov.uk/ukraine Queries about the Ukraine Families Scheme can be emailed to Ukraine@kent.gov.uk or by calling the dedicated helpline 03000 412424 which has a translation service. The latest information I have on numbers is that 3,062 refugees have been matched to 1,235 sponsors here in Kent; the Ukrainian refugees are overwhelmingly women and children. Around 7,000 households in our County have volunteered to be part of *Homes for Ukraine*, one of the highest number in the UK, so we can expect to see many more Ukrainian people here in Kent. As with the Covid-19 emergency we are working closely with the District Councils, the voluntary sector and other public sector partners to provide the necessary support.

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