

**2022/23 Annual Report from Susan Carey
Member for Elham Valley, Kent County Council
North Downs West edition**

International events have had a major impact on us here in Kent with record arrivals from small boat crossings of the Channel, a record-breaking heat wave and major disruption to our local road network from problems with Cross Channel crossings for cars, coaches and HGVs. Above all last year's invasion of Ukraine has not only brought refugees here to Kent but has led to high levels of inflation particularly in energy costs.

The County Council share of the council tax bill went up 5% last April but, like everyone else, we've had to deal with inflation of 10% in general but much higher for expenditure on some costs such as roads and building school places. Together with the continuing high demand for social care from an ageing population, we have had to make savings across all areas of our expenditure. When the figures are finalised for 2022/23 we expect that the overspend on our budget will be around £45m. Reserves are being used to help meet this but reserves can only be used once and in 2023/24 we need to make savings of £55m to balance expenditure with income.

There's been a warm response from people in Kent to the Ukrainian refugees. Since March 2022, 3207 Ukrainians have found a temporary home in Kent under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and 892 more are still on their way. KCC has worked with the district councils across Kent to support both the Ukrainians and their hosts and we have provided top up payments to hosts to encourage hosts to come forward/continue as the war goes on. There are around 600 Ukrainian children in our schools. Locally I've been involved in arrangements for school transport for some of these children.

KCC has also been helping Kent residents who are facing financial difficulties through our Helping Hands and Financial Hardship and Free School Meal programmes, support with energy and water bills, and financial advice. You can find out more on the KCC website under the 'Kent Together' banner or ring 03000 41 92 92. There's also help for those who need someone to talk to. 'Release the Pressure' has trained counsellors on 0800 107 0160 or text the word KENT to 85258. This service is available 24 hours a day seven days a week.

KCC was allowed to make one bid to the Government's Levelling Up fund and we chose a project to improve access to and in Dover port. We were successful in winning £45m for this project which is expected to be in place in the next two years. It won't solve all the problems with Cross Channel traffic but it is a

significant step forward in tackling a problem that impacts the whole county and East Kent in particular.

Through all the challenges of the last year KCC's staff have been delivering over 300 services many of which go unnoticed but are nevertheless vital for our community. Looking ahead we know that the present way of funding social care means this part of our responsibility will eventually leave us with no funding for anything else. Together with Hampshire County Council we have written an open letter to the Government with our concerns. A new model of local government, more devolution of power and budgets from central Government, and closer working with the NHS offer a way to both cope with social care and offer the other services we all value.

I continue to have a special responsibility for Environment at KCC. This includes KCC's network of 19 Household Waste & Recycling Centres and the disposal of the kerbside waste collected by the district councils. A new Household Waste Recycling Centre was opened in Allington only last year and is an example of the sort of modern site needed for the future. As part of the savings KCC needs to make we are considering options for saving £1m by closing up to four of our smallest sites that do not have room to be expanded to a full range of recycling. Alternative options are to close three sites and reduce opening hours elsewhere. There is more than sufficient capacity at KCC's sites to deal with present volumes of waste through the remaining 15 sites but the change would reduce the number of Kent residents within a 20 minute drive time from 96% to 94.2%. I expect the public consultation on options to start mid July.

We have made significant progress on reducing KCC's carbon emissions and our energy costs through more solar and replacing lights with LED. Our SolarTogether project uses collective buying power to help Kent households get a good price for solar panels. Round Three is open for registration for Kent residents to receive a no obligation quote. So far over 5,000 Kent households have registered their interest. KCC is also working with Connect Kerb and district councils across Kent on EV 600 which will see more than 600 Electric Vehicle charging points installed in council car parks. The charging points in Lyminge are part of this project and the charging points in Elham are part of KCC's parish charger scheme to install EV charging points in car parks at village halls and other community owned car parks.

In 2019 KCC pledged to plant 1.5 million extra trees in the county (our Plan Tree). So far we've established 160,004 trees with 48,073 trees planted between December 2022 and March 2023. KCC has been successful in winning grants not just for tree planting but also to increase our Plan Tree team which

means we can make more bids and run more projects. A community orchard is being planted in Elham with trees supplied by Brogdale and we expect to plant many more trees in the year ahead.

I have supported the following projects in the North Downs West part of my division:

£500 to Stanford Parish Council towards a defibrillator

£650 to the Parents & Friends of Lyminge Primary School for a shed

£1,000 to Etchinghill Residents Association towards Platinum Jubilee events

£2,500 for the purchase of wildflower seeds to support Kent's Plan Bee

£692 to St Mary's church Sellindge for floor restoration

£500 to KCC Youth Services towards the Youth Club in Sellindge

Do please let me know of any suitable projects in our area as although Member Grants have been reduced as part of our budget savings I do still have some funding.

The last year has seen many challenges but Kent's residents, voluntary organisations, businesses and public sector have all shown great resilience. We will need this all the more in the year ahead.

May 2023