

Report for Sellindge Parish Council 12 December 2023

The Government's Autumn Statement was a disappointment for councils that have Social Care responsibilities, and we can only hope that the Local Government settlement, which is usually announced just before Christmas, may contain better news.

There's some good news for Kent about the recent court proceedings on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. The court has ruled that the Home Secretary has acted unlawfully in the arrangements for dealing with UASC arriving in Kent and in making sure the burden of dealing with them is shared between councils. It's been a problem for many years but the recent jump in numbers (over 1,200 new arrivals in just three months) has made the situation much worse. We now expect the Home Office to ensure there is a proper transfer scheme in place and to fully fund reception centres here in Kent.

I thought it would be useful to update you all on the many schemes to help people who may be struggling financially or mentally. The best place to look is at Kent Together and there's a link on the home page of Kent County Council at www.kent.gov.uk There's advice about funding, benefits, reducing energy costs, budgeting and how to either get a referral or self refer for help. For those who prefer the phone to the web the number is 03000 41 92 92.

Release the pressure is a KCC helpline for those with mental health problems. It's available 24/7 at 0800 107 0160.

KCC has just launched a scheme to recycle IT equipment – PCs, laptops, printers and mobile phones. It's open to residents, businesses and organisations and is free to use. You can book a collection slot and your equipment will be wiped of data and reused where possible or recycled when not. See <https://www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/rubbish-and-recycling/device-recycling-scheme>

The Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty now have a new name - they and the National Parks are now called National Landscapes. The name change is important as it's a signal that the AONBs are of equal value to the National Parks. KCC hosts the Kent Downs National Landscape team, and they do brilliant work not least in running the Government's Farming in a Protected Landscape scheme (FIPL). Over a year ago Kent Downs AONB launched with the Parc Naturel Regional des Caps et Marais d'Opale for Geopark status with UNESCO and we're now very hopeful of a positive outcome. Geopark status would raise the profile of these two areas connected by chalk and help promote tourism in our area.

Susan Carey, KCC Member for Elham Valley