

## Report for Parish Council 09 January 2024

This is an edited version of a recent review of 2023 by KCC Leader Roger Gough which I thought would make a better report than anything I could produce.

“There are significant challenges we as an authority, like many others across the country, are facing. We are not a council that has been reckless with its finances, far from it, and our sound decisions have given us the best possible chance to stave off what has been coming down the track at us. However, we are not immune to the impacts.

Increased costs and demands on our services have meant we have had to face some very hard budgetary decisions. In Kent we have specific issues, such as travel disruption at our ports, and the response to migration and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Despite what we shoulder, central government funding has fallen far short. There is no doubt that times are exceedingly tough.

We cannot focus only on survival but on continuing to change and innovate, while delivering good services to the people of Kent. Looking back on 2023, there have been some notable moments, some of which have seen us rising to support our residents through shock after shock, not least the cost-of-living crisis and helping people in the most difficult circumstances.

Our solid collaboration with the NHS has seen some excellent work on seasonal campaigns and the development of the Integrated Care Strategy. Our task in 2024 will be to start turning this into practical delivery across our county and our communities.

RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) entered the common vernacular in 2023. Our swift action following the change of national rules, helped in no small part by the rapid flexibility of our school community, kept disruption to a minimum.

We are a key partner in the Kent Resilience Forum, responding to the pressures on our extensive and much-travelled road network with Kent Police, National Highways and others. Our highways and other staff respond to emergencies on our own road network in all weathers.

We have an exceptional record in responding to the diverse issues of asylum, migration and resettlement, including responding (across many parts of our organisation) to the referral of more than 2,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into our service in the last year, and working with district and borough colleagues in response to the requirement to empty the Afghan bridging hotels in the late summer.

We are committed to the environment, balancing everything we consider with nature's voice and its unrivalled positive impact on health and wellbeing, and preserving the enduring appeal of the Garden of England. I look forward to taking forward our initiatives, such as Making Space for Nature, in 2024.

These could be viewed as the 'big ticket items' and are only a small selection of the services that KCC provides. I am incredibly proud that some of the greatest effects of our work can be felt in the quiet, often unseen, interactions full of kindness, compassion and thoughtfulness from across all of our teams.

Roger Gough, Leader, Kent County Council”

I send my best wishes to you and the parish for the year ahead.

Susan Carey, Member for Elham Valley, Kent County Council