

## DISTRICT COUNCILLORS & KENT COUNCILLOR REPORT/S

### District Councillor Report – Sellindge Parish Council 11 February 2025

**Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation** - In view of the Government Reorganisation Programme with Kent County Council, Medway Council and the Districts and Boroughs likely to disappear over the next few years, I put forward a motion to full Council on 29 January to ask the Secretary of State for permission to remain as a Cabinet/Leader style of Governance. This is to allow resources, Officer and staff time and funding to be focused on ensuring our residents get the best deal possible moving forward. The motion was passed by 16 votes to 13.

It is extremely disappointing that Kent is not in the priority programme as some funding was promised. However, Kent and Medway are still expected, to put forward a proposal by the end of March on how many Unitary Council's Kent and Medway should have with a full programme of implementation by the autumn. In the meantime Kent County Council elections will take place this May.

**Kent & Medway Police & Crime Panel** – I attended the Budget Police & Crime Panel on 4 February. In order to balance the budget, there is a need to make savings of £10m – for details [Agenda for Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel on Tuesday, 4th February, 2025, 10.00 am](#) In the circumstances, it was unanimously agreed to an increase in the precept to £14 per year for a Band D Property. Meetings are held quarterly and I can put one question to the Commissioner on policy (not operations), the next meeting is in June.

**Scrutiny Programme – 2025-2026** - Residents have the opportunity to shape the programme of the council's overview and scrutiny committee. Ideas do not have to be limited to the council or its services – but cannot include planning applications, licensing matters, housing appeals or disciplinary issues. For further details [Getting what matters to you on the agenda | Folkestone & Hythe District Council](#)

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## **Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation**

We have been informed that KCC is not on the priority list for devolution, meaning that the KCC Elections in May of this year will be going ahead as originally planned. It is, however, having to go through the Government's plan for local government reorganisation. This means that the District Council will be absorbed into a Unitary Council at some point in the future. The make-up of the Unitary Council is yet to be decided.

## **Otterpool Park**

Agreeing the final collaboration agreement is moving into a final stage. Interviews have recently been carried out for the post of Home England's project manager. Homes England have decided to appoint their own project manager in order to independently report on progress during the collaboration agreement period.

## **Lyminge Age UK**

The District Council have said there will be a lot of work to be done before they can consider what to do about Everist Court. They have done a condition survey on the building to update their stock condition records. They have said that the work is at a very early stage and a final decisions about what can be done with the building as not yet been made. However, to continue to make use of the building as a community facility would need to keep the fire alarm, lift, boilers, fire extinguishers, etc. compliant, maintained and serviced and the council do not have the resources to do this.

## **Pension Credit**

If you are over 66 and are not eligible for pension credit you could be entitled to vouchers worth £200 to help pay for food, energy or both, via the KCC Just Missing Out Scheme. Visit [kent.gov.uk/justmissingout](http://kent.gov.uk/justmissingout) to apply or call your local Citizens Advice branch for support – 0300 304 8003. Applications close 28 February 2025 or when funds are all spent.

Also the FHDC Home Essential Fund is back open for white goods and beds. You need to be on a means tested benefit with less than £1,000 in savings. To apply visit [www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living/home-essential-fund](http://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living/home-essential-fund)

## **Green Grants**

FHDC are to launch a Green Grants scheme later this month. The money will be available over the next two years and is targeted at groups whose aim is to enhance social cohesion, increase climate resilience and reduce carbon footprints by increasing energy efficiency, enhancing green spaces and areas for local wildlife. This will be available across the district and are for varying amounts depending on the project. Applications will be invited from parishes, community groups and other organisations and can be used for anything from rewilding and tree planting to parish premises improvements.

## **Social Housing Decarbonisation**

Work has been completed on another 120 council-owned homes with a range of energy efficient measures which will help tenants manage their energy bills. Insulation, solar panels, and air source heat pumps have been installed where appropriate by FHDC and match funding by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. The first phase has already seen the decrease in the total CO2 emissions of just under 295 tonnes per year.

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## Report for Sellindge Parish Meeting 11 February 2025

The Government has rejected the application from Kent County Council and Medway Council to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme. This means we must still produce plans for unitary councils (putting the district councils together with KCC) but we won't have elections for a mayor in 2026 or the extra funding and powers that were promised to go with this. Elections will however go ahead as planned for KCC in May.

KCC has its all-day meeting to debate and agree its budget for 2025/26 on Thursday 13 February. The proposal is for a 5% rise which is the maximum that can be set without holding a referendum. Most councils in England are also setting the maximum allowed - either 5% if they have social care responsibilities or 3% otherwise (parish and town councils are not limited in this way). A few have been given permission by the Government for higher rises ranging from 7.49% to 9.99%.

During the General Election campaign Labour promised a one-year council tax freeze. The last council tax freeze took place over ten years ago when the Conservative Government offered councils the equivalent of a 2% council tax increase if they kept their council tax charges the same as the year before and most councils accepted the offer. This was also the same time that the requirement for a referendum was introduced for council tax rises above a limit set annually by Government. The new Labour Government has not made such an offer and whilst it has raised funding for councils the increase falls short of the increased costs (both direct and indirect) from National Insurance and Minimum Wage increases. This means that even with a 5% increase KCC needs to make savings.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent & Medway is now available for public consultation at [Let's talk Kent](#) and everyone is invited to give their views on what's now proposed following much work including workshops across Kent and the opportunity for both individuals and organisations to contribute. Called 'Making Space for Nature' this policy will be crucial for identifying the land that's available or needed for nature and how we will measure success. Please give your views.

I was pleased to see that the Chancellor has indicated support for the Lower Thames Crossing. The new Government had announced a delay in making a decision until May 2025 and that is still the date when a Development Consent Order is expected. This project is a nationally important one and particularly key for Kent. Most HGV traffic currently uses the M20 and, if there is disruption to cross Channel traffic,

congestion and delays spread out across our local roads and the M20 is used to manage queuing HGVs. As residents of Sellindge know only too well, these delays are a major disruption to people's lives and businesses.

The Lower Thames Crossing will offer a better route for Dover bound HGV traffic and KCC will be pushing for the upgrades needed to Kent's roads to accommodate the expected change in traffic flows.

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