

District Councillor Report – Sellindge Parish Council 11 March 2025

Budget 2025/26

The current Administration agreed the budget for 2025/2026 on 26 February 2025. This budget increases Council Tax by 2.99% - an increase of £8.85 on a Band D Property. Fees and charges were also increased. My group abstained from voting because we are concerned by the decrease in assets of £17.2m due to the land held for the Princes Parade Project being revalued as amenity land instead of residential development land. We also asked a question on provision of leisure facilities within the District (including a swimming pool) as there is no immediate funding shown in the budget. There is an additional expense regarding the increased Employers' National Insurance contributions of about £250,000 as the Government promised re-imbursement only covered half the cost and this is only for this year!

Local Government Re-organisation

The Government has asked for interim plans on Local Government Re-organisation by 21 March. This involves the creation of a one tier system across Kent. By the time you read this, proposals for the number of unitary Councils for Kent and Medway will have been submitted to Government. There are likely to be four Models submitted.

Model 1 is a three unitary model which has FHDC with Ashford, Dover, Thanet and Canterbury

Model 2 is a four unitary model which has FHDC with Dover and Ashford

Model 3 is a four unitary model which has FHDC with Ashford & Swale

Model 4 is a four unitary model which has FHDC with Thanet and Dover

FHDC have agreed to do some analysis on the models with a view to assessing which is the best model for the District. This is additional work for Officers and is likely to increase the Council's cost.

Government have promised feedback on the initial proposals to the District Leaders and it is expected that a full detailed proposal will need to be submitted by 28 November 2025.

However, if there is no overall agreement by District Leaders, the Government could impose a model on us!

The view of my group is to go for Model 1, merging with Ashford, Dover, Thanet and Canterbury. Although this seems very large scale it is very much in keeping with the Government criteria in that a Unitary should have a minimum of 500,000 (Model 1 would be about 650,000) population. Other models have at least one unitary less than the 500,000 population.

However, watch this space!

Jenny Hollingsbee

Report for Sellindge Parish Meeting 11 March 2025

KCC set its budget for 2025/26 at an all-day meeting on Thursday 13 February. Your council tax will rise by 4.99% but the only area where spending will increase is social care with all other areas bearing the brunt

of the necessary savings to meet increased costs (mostly arising from the Government's budget) and the demand for social care. The vast majority of councils are increasing council tax by the maximum allowed before a referendum is required (5%) with a few being allowed by the Government to have higher rises without a referendum. There are schemes to help individuals in financial difficulties and **Kent Together** on the KCC website is a good place to start any search for anyone struggling to pay council tax.

One of the many duties KCC undertakes is the Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme which started in March 2022. Kent saw one of the largest numbers of householders offering accommodation to Ukrainians who had fled the invasion of their country by Russia. That scheme was closed in February 2025 but many Ukrainians are still based in Kent and KCC itself has a Memorandum of Understanding to develop and deepen co-operation with Chernihiv, one of the regions in Ukraine. There are plans this year for community and educational links as well as joint work on veterans' policy and links between respective chambers of commerce and industry. Support for Ukraine remains strong in the County.

KCC has now sent out offers for Secondary School places for pupils starting this September. 21,767 applications were made and more than 96% have been offered one of their four preferred schools with 81% offered their first choice (up from 79% last year). KCC is now helping find places for those who did not receive a place (usually because not all four preferences were used) in a second round of offers on 24 April.

KCC has won the Local Authority Energy Efficiency Award for the Southeast with its solar farm at Kings Hill singled out for praise. This site was a redundant pig farm and now generates three million kWh of electricity a year reducing KCC's energy costs and carbon emissions. As someone deeply involved in winning the grant funding for this project and the work involved to deliver it, I am delighted it has now been cited as an example for other councils to follow.

Susan Carey

Member for Elham Valley, Kent County Council

Local Government Re-organisation

A Public meeting is being held by on the 17th March in the Council Chamber at 6pm where there will be a short presentation and then the meeting will be opened for questions for the rest of the evening. Everyone is invited, Councillors and residents, but if you are unable to attend the meeting it is also being live streamed and will be recorded. If you have any questions Email questions to committee@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk or post questions to LGR

Meeting, Democratic Services, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Civic Centre, Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, Kent, CT20 2QY

If requested by the Parish Council, the Leader of F&HDC, Cllr Jim Martin, has offered to come and speak at your meeting to answer any further questions from Councillors.

Lyminge Age UK

The Lyminge Age UK building is to be handed back to F&HDC at the end of this month. F&HDC have appointed City Guardians to provide security to prevent squatting, vandalism and theft from the building whilst it is empty. F&HDC are considering all options and no final decision has been made about this. City Guardians work by letting out rooms on a rolling monthly contract so the council can get the property back at very short notice. Guardians have to be over 18 years old and are vetted by City Guardians before they are registered as guardians and able to rent rooms from any of the properties they manage.

Otterpool Park

Work continues in the background to finalise the collaboration agreement with Home England. The agreement is with the lawyers and they are being encouraged to complete their review very soon so it can be signed by both sides.

Green Grants

F&HDC have launched its Green Grants scheme. The application form and details of who and how to apply can be found on the Folkestone Works website. From 6pm on the 1st April there will be an in person forum held at The Workshop in Tontine Street to help and assist with applications. Questions about the scheme can be sent to Green.Grants@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Tourism website

The revamp of the District tourism website <https://www.folkestoneandhythe.co.uk/> has gone live. The North Downs are featured on the website, including The North Downs Way, but it still needs to have some work done on it. They are hoping a map to include the villages in the North Downs area will be produced shortly.

Geopark

Geosites are sites of geological interest across the aspiring UNESCO Cross-Channel Global Geopark, where people can visit and interact with our geological heritage. The first two interpretation panels at some of the Geosites in the district will be erected shortly at Farthing Common on the North Downs and the East Cliff, Folkestone. The East Cliff panel is of particular interest as it focuses on the mega flood that cut Britain off from mainland Europe many thousands of years ago.

Verge cutting

The verge mowing contract in the district has been handed back to Kent County Council due to the excessive cost of our grounds maintenance team undertaking this work for F&HDC. A new contractor has now been appointed by Kent County Council for both urban (inner 30mph verges) and rural verges. We have been told the verges will be cut on six occasions between 1 March and 31 October. Any enquiries regarding verge mowing at locations not in the above list should be [directed to Kent County Council from now on](#) through its 'Report A Fault' function.

Council Tax

Unfortunately, the average council tax to finance Folkestone & Hythe's net spending plans in 2025/26, including special expenses, is to be increased by 2.99%. Town and parish precepts form part of the council tax requirement.

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