

District Councillor Report – February 2026

Government Re-organisation

Recently we had a briefing from the ex-Chief Executive of Cumbria County Council. He took us through the process of where we are now in terms of Local Government re-organisation up to vesting day and beyond. It looks likely from what we know and from what he says that current Members will be expected to do another year until May 2028 : some will decide to stand for the Shadow Body which will be elected in May 2027.

Storm Goretti – The District Council worked closely with Kent County Council to re-open Sandgate Esplanade after strong and forceful winds overnight caused damage to the sea wall and railings and beach-huts. Diggers are clearing the back of the sea wall to allow water to drain from the road, while teams are re-siting beach huts where possible and beginning to clear shingle from promenades. Many benches were blown away or destroyed, however, the Deputy Leader has confirmed that they will all be replaced.

Otterpool Park - I continue to question the Leader on Otterpool Park. We now understand there is another collaboration agreement with Homes England on setting up a joint Planning Group to finalise the reserve matters that are still outstanding. This apparently, runs until December 2026 so we will be watching closely!

Ward Grant – I have allocated £500 to the Sellindge Football Clubs for work to improve the pitches and £355 to Sellindge Village Hall to replace the fencing.

Napier Barracks – The District Council has just been advised that all asylum seekers accommodated at Napier Barracks have now been moved on. The Barracks will now be handed back to the Ministry of Defence who will pass it on to the Developers.

If there is an issue you would like more information on, do please let me know.

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LGR Consultation

Government ministers have launched a consultation on the future number of councils in Kent and Medway and the areas they should cover. They want to hear views from Kent organisations, residents and businesses on the biggest proposed shake up of local government in 50 years. Under the current system KCC delivers some services such as education, social services and roads, and the district councils deliver others like emptying bins and providing housing services. Under the proposed system, a much smaller number of unitary councils would deliver all council services in one area. Councils across Kent and Medway have worked together to draw up a series of options for the number of unitary authorities needed and what areas they should cover. It is important you have your say on the future of the council structure and how they deliver vital services.

To take part in the government's consultation, visit [Proposals for local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway - GOV.UK](#). The deadline for responses is 11.59pm on Thursday 26 March 2026. Once the consultation closes, the civil servants and ministers will consider everyone's responses alongside the evidence that has been presented to them. A decision on which option ministers have chosen is likely to be announced in the summer.

Freight to Rail

Concerted lobbying by F&HDC Green Councillors and local MP, Sojan Joeseph, has resulted in Network Rail securing the Barking Goods Yards resulting as an intermodal hub allowing the transfer of freight and goods from both lorries and the National Rail Network on to European gauge wagons which will allow freight to move seamlessly into mainland Europe. This intermodal hub has the potential to remove 140,000 lorries per year from the M20 and is a significant move in reducing traffic on the M20. This will also help to relieve the traffic movements through Sellindge.

Council Tax Reduction

An improved council tax reduction scheme which will further help working age, low-income households will come into effect in April. F&HDC have developed a revised approach – offering up to 100% support – in response to the rise in the cost of living and the withdrawal of incentive funding by Kent County Council. The assistance will automatically be introduced for eligible households at the start of the 2026/27 financial year. Nearly 6,000 working age households in the district currently receive council tax reduction. All will receive correspondence explaining the changes in their annual bill

Swimming under the spotlight

Councillors will be considering funding proposals to help re-open Folkestone Sports Centre pool and make much-needed improvements to the council-owned Hythe Pool. A one-off £2.4million grant to help The Sports Trust to refurbish the Folkestone pool, changing rooms and pool plant machinery is being considered. Once this work is carried out, attention could then turn to Hythe Pool.

Lower Leas cliff work

Stabilisation work has just begun near The Vinery in Folkestone's Lower Leas Coastal Park.

The work involves regrading the cliff edge, soil nailing and the installation of netting and is necessary following the 2024 landslide. Once the work is completed (expected early April), the upgrade of equipment in the park's adventure playground can begin.

Shaping the district's economic growth

Residents and businesses are urged to have their say in the council's plan to support sustainable and inclusive growth across the district. A [short survey](#) can be completed online or by picking up a paper copy from the Civic Centre. It will inform work by the council in areas such as green innovation and low-carbon growth, strengthening the visitor economy and making better use of land and employment sites. The survey needs to be completed before 16 March 2026

Next step for Folkestone regeneration

Work on a key aspect of the £20m project regenerating Folkestone town centre has begun. A new "green heart" is replacing the former Folkestone bus station at Bouverie Square with a more inviting space being created, including an area for play. The work is part of the Folkestone – A Brighter Future programme. This is being largely funded by central government after the district council successfully bid for a share of what was known as Levelling Up investment.

Folca building

The council's Cabinet are due to be asked this month to agree moving forward with a commercial, mixed-use development for the Folca 2 building in Folkestone town centre. This would also include the provision of a medical centre in the Art Deco section of the building. Meanwhile progress is being made on the sale of Folca 1- the Edwardian part. Six bids were submitted and the council has now identified a preferred bidder whose intention is to restore this part of the building to its former glory. Funds from the sale will go towards the development of Folca 2.

Volunteer award scheme

The search is on for volunteers who go that extra mile in dedicating their time and skills for others in the district. Nominations are open for the [Folkestone & Hythe Excellence in Volunteering Awards](#) run on behalf of the council by Kent Coast Volunteering. Awards will be presented in June and the deadline for nominations is Friday 17 April.

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