

District Councillor Report - August 2026

I have to start with the tragic death of Ann Widdecome believed to have been murdered in her own home in Dorset. No words can describe the absolute horror that is felt by her friends and family as well as the wider community. My condolences are with her friends and family at this difficult time.

I recently took part in a cross party video to demonstrate that although our political beliefs are very different we can, and do respect our differences. This was to mark the 10th anniversary of the murder of Jo Cox and five years since the murder of Sir David Amiss in his surgery.

LGA Conference - I recently attended this Conference in Bournemouth where there were many sessions on Local Government Re-organisation. We were told that imminently we would have an announcement as to who FHDC would be partnering with and by the time you read this we may know. I attended a session on Town & Parish Councils after LGR where Catherine Needham, co-author of "The 21st Century Parish and Town Councillor and Clerk" Report, discussed and debated many of the challenges faced. See <https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/the-21st-century-parish-and-town-councillor-and-clerk/>

National Planning Reform - as from 31 October 2026 there are likely to be major changes in how decisions on planning applications are dealt with. Councillors' will no longer have the opportunity to 'call-in' an application. Applications will be considered under two criteria with only major applications being considered by the Planning Committee. More on this next month.

Lydon Field Lyminge - I attended the Exhibition on the proposed development and have noted many issues raised by residents.

Solar Farms - My group are putting forward a motion on Solar Farms to the next full Council Meeting due to be held on 22 July - details are published on the Council website.

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Otterpool Park

Otterpool Park LLP held a Public exhibition here in Sellindge Village Hall on Wednesday 24 June. The Exhibition was to update the public on the next steps for Otterpool Park. The council resolved to grant planning permission for Otterpool Park in 2023 and several elements have progressed. The

exhibition covered the changes at Otterpool Park. Homes England have purchased Hillcrest Farm which is close to Westenhanger station. They are planning to develop the southern end of the site for the delivery of the first homes there with an access road coming off the A20.

Green Grants

The Green Grants scheme has been launched again and is open for applications. A £250,000 package of support for organisations to deliver sustainable and carbon reducing projects in the Folkestone and Hythe district has been agreed. Applications for four categories of funding and bids have to be received by Friday 17 July so need to be submitted very soon. Applications can be made on the [Folkestone Works](#) website.

Neighbourhood Inspection

On the 25th June I attended the Neighbourhood Inspection of Council owned properties in the North Downs area with a member of the Housing Team and a representative from Mears. The general state of repairs of the properties we gained access to was good the only issues mentioned several times was the cutting of the verges. It was pointed out that this was now done by KCC.

North Downs Forum

At the last North Downs Forum meeting we had a talk by Michaela Lockett, the Good Neighbours Service Co-Ordinator at Kent Coast Volunteering. Their volunteer befrienders contact lonely people experiencing social isolation in the south coast area including the North Downs. They also provide transport for people to get to appointments. They are looking for volunteer drivers and volunteers with some time to spare to contact clients on a regular basis. They can also be contacted if you know someone who would like to use their Good Neighbour service or require transport to attend appointments. Please call 01304 367898 if you can volunteer or know anyone who would like their help. The next meeting is being held at Knowler Farm on the 24th September when the topic will focus on producing food for your own use.

Renters' Rights Act

Renting is changing and the council's private sector housing team has been working to get the message out to tenants, landlords and letting agents living and working in the private rented sector. The first phase of the Act, which came into force on 1 May, is tenancy reforms and details are published on the council website. The Act abolishes Section 21 'no fault' evictions. Landlords will no longer be able to serve a notice without providing a valid reason for eviction.

Accommodation for Homeless people

F&HDC has bought a block of new flats to help residents facing homelessness. The flats in central Folkestone, are to provide short-term housing for families facing the crisis of having nowhere to live. The eight two-bedroomed flats, have been designed to offer safe, modern and energy efficient accommodation. Each flat is fully self-contained, giving residents privacy and stability while they wait to move into permanent housing. The purchase is part of the council's pledge to invest £5 million in supporting residents and reducing costs by expanding its supply of council owned flats to be used for temporary accommodation. This reduces the cost of using private, nightly-let short-term accommodation.

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Kent County Councillor Update Report for Parishes, 13 July 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

The government has pledged to announce the future for local government in Kent by mid-July 2026. It is possible that devolution through the establishment of regional strategic authorities will return to the government's agenda. Five options for local government reorganisation were submitted from the County, however there was no consensus on the best option amongst the local authorities. KCC has prepared extensively (including submitting a detailed proposal and assessing 165 of its services for disaggregation), although matters of resilience of services is a great concern for elected Members.

KCC Budget Consultation

KCCs consultation on its budget for 2027/28 is open to 7 September 2026. The public's views are being sought on which services matter most to them, where savings should be made and Council Tax. In 2025/26, the Council made £100 million of savings, reduced long-term debt by 20%, set a balanced budget with no additional borrowings and a net increase to reserves, and increased spend in Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Growth, Environment and Transport. KCC set a percentage Council Tax rise lower than 89% of County, Unitary and Metropolitan Authorities in England. Your views are welcome at www.kent.gov.uk/budget

Fly-Tipping

KCC, through the Leader Linden Kemkaran, organised Kent's first-ever conference on Fly-Tipping on 10 July 2026, bringing together local authorities, enforcement agencies, central government representatives and landowners to explore ways that these agencies could work better together to address this blight on our towns, villages and countryside.

A plan of action is being prepared following the conference.

Solar Generation

KCC has produced a position statement outlining its view on solar farm developments in the County. There are numerous proposals under consideration currently and in the position statement KCC states its objection to excessively large proposals, developments on our best countryside, and concerns with battery storage developments. KCC believes that solar development can be positioned best on rooftops and old industrial sites.

Water Resilience Partnership

In the past 12 months, Kent has experienced significant and disruptive water supply issues. KCC believes that this situation is not acceptable and has pledged to establish a Water Resilience Partnership for Kent. In order to do this, KCC is calling all major players (government, local authorities, water providers, developers, farming and businesses, water management, and campaign and interest groups) to gather for the inaugural meeting and workshop on 8 October 2026. KCCs view is that a framework for collaborative action is required, and that will be the outcome from this inaugural meeting.

Summer Reading Challenge

The theme for this year's Summer Reading Challenge for 4 – 11 year olds is 'Read to the Beat' and will involve music, rhythm and storytelling. There will be free events and workshops held at libraries.

Signing up for the challenge can be done at libraries or online. Last year, 18,000 children took part in Kent. See www.kent.gov.uk/summerreadingchallenge

Member Community Grants

Small grants in the region of £250 to £500 are available for community events and activities. Applicant organisations must have a bank account and be non-profit-making. To get the ball rolling, please send short details of your project to Christopher.Hespe@kent.gov.uk

Short Film on First Year

If you would like to watch a short film on the first year of the Reform UK administration at KCC, please search the following on Youtube: Reform UK Kent: 1 year in Control of KCC/What We've Achieved for Kent.

Chris Hespe, Kent County Councillor for Elham Valley and Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation