

Annual KCC Report 2017-2018

Thank you all for your support during the year and for electing me, with an increased majority, to represent you as your County Councillor for an eighth four year term.

The year leading up to the recent budget has been even more of a challenge: it has been calculated that funding for local government has fallen by 47% over the past 7 years whilst demand for services, particularly in social care, has been increasing. Our aim is to deliver the budget whilst minimising reductions in services. At KCC we have planned for these budget pressures and have not run budget deficits whilst maintaining reserves. KCC remains financially sound.

A further challenge which we are aware of is the deficit in provision of infrastructure to accommodate the housing growth that Kent faces. This is the product of demographic change - or growth - and the practical inability of London to provide enough housing. KCC is working to achieve better infrastructure provision and there is some good news with investment planned by Network Rail, the Lower Thames Crossing, the Major Roads Network proposals and more, such as the M20 widening by use of the safety lanes.

Before Christmas we were concerned that we would need to reduce our expenditure on subsidised bus services by £2.25 million. There has been some misunderstanding in that 97% of buses in Kent are operated by commercial companies. KCC subsidises some routes, mainly in the east of the county, and mainly in rural areas when no service would otherwise be available. By talking with bus companies they have managed to link some of these routes to other services, to cause minimum inconvenience. Some services were being subsidised by tax payers by almost £20 per journey. Our savings target for this year has now reduced to £455,000. We have also put funds aside to help communities apply for help to set up taxi/bus type services that meet the needs of their community. To discuss this we are launching, through KALC, the Big Conversation, which will lead to a Rural Bus Summit in the summer.

Speeding traffic through villages, HGVs (including parking) and congestion remain a problem for us all. Junctions 3 to 5 of the M20 will be widened by a lane in each direction which will mean a lot of disruption and inconvenience during construction. I anticipate the Addington footbridge will be replaced during this period. I hope that the Offham enhancement scheme will help deter through traffic and that speed detector equipment will also help all villages which endure this problem. The A228 Snodland bypass is a particular area for concern about speed and a signalised pedestrian crossing is needed to help access schools, the renovated station and open spaces. I will continue to work hard to get this funded.

Still on highways, we have added £2m to the £8.1m already in the budget for pothole repairs, following the recent snow emergencies. KCC deploy 60 full size gritters, 5 mini gritters and 117 farmers with snow ploughs fitted to tractors to help keep the roads clear. Treatment of main routes was carried out twice a day at times, instead of once. Problems on minor roads were sometimes caused by drivers abandoning their vehicles in the middle of the road making it impossible for farmers to clear the drifting snow. Many messages of appreciation to highways during the bad weather were gratefully received. To help repair the roads we are also using smaller Kent based companies.

KCC dispose of household waste collected by districts. We are proud of the fact that only 1% of that waste now goes to landfill. Most of the rest is either recycled to electricity at Allington or to compost at the Blaise site in Offham. Litter on roads and pavements remains a problem, despite heroic efforts by the districts to collect it regularly. As does fly tipping. KCC are now cleaning road signs which does make things look better.

KCC have won national acclaim for their apprenticeship scheme, placing 236 young people in jobs in the year. Pressure on school places remains, mainly due to a population bulge which we have addressed at primary level but is a budget challenge as pupils move to secondary schools.

I am still Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services. This means that I represent the Cabinet Member at meetings he cannot attend and am briefed on the portfolio and

discuss policy matters with him. The portfolio has a wide remit which includes libraries, community wardens and safety, coroners, country parks and culture. For example, I was asked to chair a cross-party working group on ambitions for our 99 libraries. We visited libraries and were fully briefed during a series of meetings in our libraries looking at the services they deliver, which include registration of births, marriages and deaths. I was really pleased that colleagues share my enthusiasm for libraries and the very important role we think they will play in the future. We need to move with the times and promote even greater use of this very popular service.

I am the appointed trustee of Kent Music, now successfully promoting music in our schools, running music centres and County groups, and providing music tuition. I am also the nominated trustee on the board of Turner Contemporary (built and owned by KCC) in Margate whose national success has been rewarded with its selection as the venue, in 2019, for the prestigious Turner Prize. I am on the fund raising committee - it is expensive to run an art gallery with an internationally recognised education programme and fantastic exhibitions, all contributing to the regeneration of the area.

I also represent the County Council as an Assistant to the Rochester Bridge Trust, a very old charity which was endowed to maintain the crossings of the River Medway. The charity has land holdings, mainly farms, as well as invested capital which provide revenue funding. I am on the education and grants committee. We need more engineers and run great programmes about engineering for young people. We also award grants to eligible causes.

I am a trustee of the Kent Community Foundation which researches and supports many smaller charities in Kent, according to policy criteria, with charitable money endowed by generous individuals.

I am appointed to the Kent and Medway Fire Authority which now works closely with the other emergency services and KCC to provide co-ordinated action and support in emergency situations. A local example was the response to the devastating fire at Holborough Lakes.

Most recently the big issue concerning all of you is the refresh of the Kent Minerals and Waste Plan with the submission of the West Malling Sandpit at Ryarsh as a possible site for inclusion in the plan. As local member I have done my best to make sure all residents are fully aware of the consultation (now closed) and briefed on the issues involved. And, of course, that their views are listened to and taken in to consideration.

My KCC member grant has been spent on trying to improve road safety with speed counts, speed indicator devices, signage and lining (some still outstanding). Examples are the hatching replacing the mini roundabout at the entrance to Holborough Lakes and the Addington village gateway improvement. I have supported with grants: Leybourne Grange Riding Centre for the Disabled, Santa's Grotto, Spadework, Townsend Hook Bowls Club and Dynamic Communities, Ryarsh.

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