

## **Kent County Councillor Update for Parishes, 10 January 2026**

May I take this opportunity to wish every resident of Elham Valley a lovely New Year.

### **Council Tax**

For each of the past 12 years, the previous administration at KCC increased Council Tax by the maximum amount allowed, which is currently 5%. The new administration is breaking that mould and has announced an increase of 3.99% for 2026/27. Although the Reform-led Council inherited a dire financial position, prudent management of the finances has allowed the authority to stabilise finances. Although a greater reduction in the amount sought would have been ideal, the authority has to maintain its statutory services and ensure the budget is balanced and sustainable. The administration is working towards potentially making further reductions in the 'ask' for future years.

We inherited a £732 million debt, daily debt interest payments of £84 million, a £20.1 million overspend, £121 million savings target for the year and a ballooning Adult Social Care budget. In nine months of the new administration, £100 million of savings have been achieved, debt has been reduced by £67 million and nearly £40 million of future spend re-profiled, enabling the lower-than-expected Council Tax demand.

### **International Rail**

KCC continues to lobby government and other stakeholders hard for the return of international stopping rail services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet. Further to KCC's major event some months ago, Ashford BC ran a local event in Ashford to further push the concept on 8 January.

### **Supplier Conference**

KCC has produced its first commercial strategy, to ensure that it gets best value for residents from every pound spent and that Kent-based companies benefit from the annual £1.4 billion KCC procurement each year. In the past six months, there has been a significant growth in the number of Kent companies winning contracts. KCC is organising a Supplier Conference at The Showground, Detling on 27 January for suppliers to learn more about winning KCC contracts. To date, 600 have signed up to attend the free event.

### **Community Wardens**

KCC has been expanding the number of Community Wardens and now enables Parish and Town Councils to pay for new posts. KCC would welcome discussions with any Parish or Town Council interested in exploring this further.

### **Environment Tax on Foreign Lorries**

Kent's roads are damaged by large vehicles. KCC is pursuing vigorously the concept of charging foreign lorries being charged for use of Kent's roads. I would be happy to update via this Parish newsletter as this develops.

### **KCC Highways**

Since taking control of KCC in May 2025, 6,500 gullies have been drained and 35,000 potholes filled (already more than in the whole of last year). KCC Highways has recently been shortlisted for the 'most improved performance' award by the Local Government Association; although KCC is adamant that further improvements will always be sought, as it attempts to manage Kent's 5,500 miles of roads.

### **Nuclear and Energy**

KCCs stance is not anti-solar, but anti solar developments on high grade agricultural land. KCC has been leading on work to secure new nuclear provision at Dungeness. This is a long-term project, but a high priority for KCC, which has had a series of meetings with Westminster and major companies. There is significant support from the locality.

Chris Hespe

Kent County Councillor for Elham Valley

and Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Cross-Cabinet Activity