

## ANNUAL REPORT TO TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS 2014-2015

KCC has had a challenging year, yet again, with savings of over £90,000,000 needed in order to deliver a balanced budget. As part of finding these savings KCC reviewed every area of its activities. This does not mean that services will be out-sourced, though this is one of the options, particularly for back office functions, but more about how better services can be provided more efficiently. Any major change has to follow a public consultation. Budget savings had been sought, for example, in the Community Wardens service but a huge response to the consultation meant that the wardens have, in the main, been retained.

For me it has been a busy year as I have been working as Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport since 2013 and in March of 2015 I was delighted to be appointed as full Cabinet Member for the same portfolio. I am aware of the vital role that roads, transport and the environment play in the lives of Kent's residents and businesses, and I am committed to making our hard-pressed funds go as far as possible to get the best possible deal for council taxpayers

Hard work in Kent's primary schools is paying off as results in Key Stage 2 SATS are showing significant improvement. The percentage of pupils reaching the appropriate level in every category - reading, writing, English, spelling, punctuation, maths and science - at Level 4 and above has gone up in the last year. The combined figure for reading, writing and maths in Kent has improved by 5%.

We have decided to press ahead with converting our stock of 120,000 street lights to LED with Central Management System technology. This will reduce our street lighting energy bill by around 60%, meaning that we can return any residential area that wants it to all-night lighting, which may be dimmed a little after peak hours. The new technology will also enable lights to be monitored remotely so faults can be detected as soon as they develop. It will also be better for the environment. Conversion to LED could start later this year or early next and take three years to complete and will be done in two phases, starting with residential areas.

A lot of work has been done since the devastating floods of just over a year ago. I Chair the KCC Flood taskforce which has been set up to look at alternative funding streams for the Leigh Storage Barrier and Beult Flood Alleviation Schemes. Later in the summer we should hear preliminary suggestions for the Beult Scheme while work on the Leigh Barrier is going ahead as quickly as possible. I am delighted that so many people have volunteered that an army of Flood Wardens has been trained.

An extensive 12 week public consultation on our plans to modernise our Libraries, Registration and Archives Service by the creation of a charitable trust has begun. The trust concept, our preferred option, would give the service more freedom and flexibility to grow and develop, generate additional income and seek additional grant funding which is not available to KCC. Under the proposals, KCC would remain accountable for the services and would contract with the charitable trust to provide the existing services to all Kent residents, with free access to books and ICT facilities, while also maintaining the historic archives.

We have told the Airports Commission that we do not think there should be a second runway at Gatwick and we are lobbying to reduce the impact of those living in West Kent whose lives are blighted by the changes to where flights into Gatwick are now routed. The Airports Commission will release its findings after next month's election and it will then be for whatever new Government we get to decide.

At last work is under way on the A21 and the extra carriageway on the M20 over bridge at Junction 4 is keenly anticipated. We are still waiting for a decision from the Government on

providing a third Thames crossing. Our preferred option is for a new tunnel to the east of Gravesend rather than an expansion of the existing heavily congested Dartford Crossing.

On schools, we have funding for three new primary schools at Leybourne Chase, Holborough and Kings Hill and we are awaiting a decision from the Minister about the development of a grammar school extension in Sevenoaks, to relieve some of the pressure on the excellent schools in Tonbridge.

This financial year, my grant allocation has been spent on playground equipment in Wateringbury both at the Primary School and the playing fields, new football kit for Kings Hill Colts U14 team, a Dementia Project run by Carers First for Malling Rural East, a Learning IT Project for Hadlow Rural Community School, a new mower for Hadlow Bowls Club, a new youth shelter for East Peckham, a Schools Safety in Action Project for local children run by Project Salus and a new tree to be planted in Carpenters Lane Hadlow.

I would thank the Parish Councils in my Division for all their hard work and help. I would particularly thank those parish councillors who are retiring and I look forward to working with the new parish councils after the election.

Matthew Balfour

Member for Malling Rural East

March 2015