

January 2024 Update – Shellina Prendergast

Maidstone Rural East – Kent County Council

As we start a new year, some reflections on the work at County Hall during the last 12 months – a year which, like for so many people in Kent, has been difficult for Kent County Council.

Like others across the country, KCC is facing some significant financial challenges – challenges that the Council has been open about and is facing head-on. The current financial position is not one that has come about because of recklessness with public finances but as a direct result of the of the increased costs and demands on services over the last few years.

There is no doubt that times are exceedingly tough - these increased costs and demands have meant that KCC has had to face some very hard budgetary decisions. In Kent we have specific issues, such as travel disruption at our ports, and the response to migration and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Despite what we shoulder, central government funding has fallen far short of what is needed.

After developing the Securing Kent's Future plan in the autumn - [Appendix 1 - Budget Recovery Report.pdf \(kent.gov.uk\)](#) KCC is working every day with this as our roadmap and navigating towards what will be a balanced budget for this financial year, something we are legally obliged to deliver. The plan will also serve as a robust guide over the medium and longer term.

Across the country, some councils have headed into effective bankruptcy – KCC continue to keep that wolf from the door; at the same time, continuing to change and innovate, while delivering good services to the people of Kent.

Looking back on 2023, there have been some notable moments, some of which have seen KCC rising to support our residents through shock after shock, not least the cost-of-living crisis and helping people in the most difficult circumstances. This is something that remains an absolute priority.

The Council's solid collaboration with the NHS has seen some excellent work on seasonal campaigns and the development of the Integrated Care Strategy. The task in 2024 will be to start turning this into practical delivery across Kent and into our communities.

RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) entered the common vernacular in 2023. KCC's front-foot action following the change of national rules, helped in no small part by the rapid flexibility of our school community, kept disruption to a minimum.

KCC is a central plank of the Kent Resilience Forum, responding to the pressures on Kent's extensive and much-travelled road network, at the same time as working behind the scenes as a group of organisations and agencies to be ready for a crisis. At the front line, highways and other staff respond to emergencies in all weathers.

The Council has a proud and exceptional record in responding to the diverse issues of asylum, migration and resettlement, including responding (across many parts of our organisation) to the referral of more than 2,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into our service in the last year, and working with district and borough colleagues in response to the requirement to empty the Afghan bridging hotels in the late summer.

KCC is committed to the environment, balancing everything we consider with nature's voice and its unrivalled positive impact on health and wellbeing, and preserving the enduring appeal of the Garden of England.

These could be viewed as the 'big ticket items' and are only a small selection of the services that KCC provides. All of us at KCC are incredibly proud that some of the greatest effects of our work can be felt in the quiet, often unseen, interactions full of kindness, compassion and thoughtfulness from across all of our teams.

I remain, as ever, committed to working with residents, businesses and elected representatives at parish and borough councils – whether on an individual or strategic basis - to ensure the best possible outcomes for all. Please do get in touch if there is anything I can help with – Shellina.Prendergast@kent.gov.uk

Which leaves me to wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Shellina Prendergast

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