

**SHELLINA PRENDERGAST - MEMBER FOR MAIDSTONE RURAL EAST**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2018/2019**

Dear Resident,

It is two years since I came to represent residents of Maidstone Rural East at Kent County Council – and it continues to be an honour and a privilege to represent one of the very best parts of our County.

Kent County Council (KCC) approached the start of yet another financial year facing an immense challenge in setting the budget. After producing savings of some £640 million over the last eight years, the Council has risen to the challenge of finding another £73 million to fund rising spending pressures during 2019/2020. In line with most other Councils across the country, KCC has raised council tax by 2.99%, plus the 2% specifically allocated for social care – Councillors very much regretted that this proved necessary, but budget consultations indicated that residents were mostly accepting of a rise that would be “ring-fenced” for protecting front line services for our increasing aging population. The following are some examples of how the £988 million budget will be used to maintain, improve and enhance the services that will benefit our 1.5 million residents in Kent:

* Biggest ever investment in highways – from £70 million in 2017/2018 to £89 million in the current year and rising next year to £95.7 million. This is in addition to the £28 million recently received from the Department of Transport for highways improvements to mitigate against the impact of Brexit.
* Subsidised bus services – £6.2 million to ensure that many of those living in our most isolated rural communities have access to the services they need.
* Housing related support for the most vulnerable - £7.1 million
* £6.5 million on community services including community wardens, arts and culture, country parks
* Children in need of family support - £9.8 million
* Young Person’s Travel Pass - £8.1 million on this non-statutory service.

Brexit – as part of the Kent Resilience Forum, KCC is committed to preparing for the country’s anticipated withdrawal and extensive work has taken place to keep Kent moving and open for business. This includes working with Highways England to keep the M20 open in both directions, minimising disruption for local communities and implementing welfare plans for those who may be affected by delays. Extra Trading Standards Officers have been recruited to address the issue of illegal or unsafe goods entering the County. On resilience, KCC has been overhauling its business continuity plans, providing advice to other businesses and working to minimise disruptions on our schools, hospitals and vulnerable residents. KCC will continue to liaise with central government, fine tune our plans and keep our communities informed over the coming months.

As well as attending meetings of the Council, I am also a member of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee, the Regulations Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel – like all of us at KCC, I am very proud to be a corporate parent to Kent’s looked after children and care leavers. Appointments to outside bodies include the Red Hill Trust – a registered charity offering support to children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The welfare of our children and young people is one of the Council’s key priorities and my work as a Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education includes responsibilities for commissioning of school places, special educational needs and disability assessment and placement, youth and youth justice, Children in Care services, adolescent support and the fostering and adoption service.

During my time at KCC, I have worked with residents, parish councils/meetings and Helen Whately MP to address the pledges I made to you when elected, and these include:

**Transport and Highways**

* Speeding, rat running, volume of traffic and inconsiderate parking are a problem for all of us. I have worked with Kent Highways, the Police, Cabinet Members and our MP to improve highway safety not only in our rural villages but also the strategic road networks which impact on residents of Maidstone Rural East - most notably the A20, A249 and the A274.
* Lorry Park – I have worked closely with residents and parish councils on the speculated lorry park between J8-9 of the M20. Helen Whately MP and I have worked closely on this and are both in regular contact with Highways England. We both spoke at a recent and very well attended public meeting and hopefully were able to reassure concerned residents that we are doing everything possible to leave the decision makers in no doubt that the proposal in this area is completely unacceptable to our residents and would cause severe damage to the built and natural environment.
* Access for All – Over the last 12 months, I have worked with our MP, Headcorn parish council and the community to secure step free access to Headcorn station for some of our most vulnerable users. Although unsuccessful in the first round, we are all committed to launching a further bid for the soon to be announced mid-tier programme where accessibility can be delivered for under £1m – which Headcorn would undoubtedly qualify for.
* Rural Transport – Many of our rural parishes are poorly served by public transport and I have worked with commercial bus operators and KCC public transport officers to ensure that good levels of service are maintained where possible. I was particularly delighted, following some considerable lobbying on my part, when it was revealed earlier this year that the bus pilots launched in Kent would include enhanced services to many of the rural villages I represent. The pilot schemes are due to commence in June 2019 and will run for 12 months. I very much hope that the service will be popular and that increased usage will lead to a more permanent service.
* Many of our children are facing unacceptably long daily journeys to school and back – and I am in constant dialogue with bus operators on how these journeys can be shortened and to ensure our children have access to a high quality and reliable service to enable them to get to school on time.

**Education**

* The unprecedented population growth in Maidstone has put some significant pressure on early years settings and primary schools. I have worked with my Cabinet colleagues and Education Officers to ensure a sufficiency of places and was delighted that my work on the nursery school provision in Headcorn paid off – Juniors Nursery opened in January this year on a temporary two-year basis on the Headcorn primary school site – and I’m continuing with my efforts to secure a long-term solution. I am also working with other areas facing a similar shortfall – I firmly believe it is important to give our children the best start in life and give their parents/carers the opportunity to fulfil work and other commitments.
* With primary schools, I continue to work with Cabinet colleagues, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, Maidstone Borough Council and our MP to ensure that every child has access to a good or outstanding school within proximity of their local area.

**Planning and Infrastructure**

* My well-established record in fighting decision makers on inappropriate development within our rural areas has continued at a pace. I am particularly concerned with housing developments where vital infrastructure such as schools, transport links and medical and community facilities have not been properly considered. I have worked very closely with Lenham Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Planning Group in ensuring that highways and education provision are sustainable for both current and future residents.

**Communications**

* Kent County Council is working with the Government’s broadband agency, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to improve access to superfast broadband services. To date, this work has already brought superfast broadband to over 134,000 homes and businesses, who would otherwise have been left with no, or slow broadband. This means that 95% of properties across Kent and Medway can now access a superfast broadband service of at least 24mbps. I am working with residents in many of our communities – Hucking, Hollingbourne and Ulcombe – to secure a better service and more information can be found on <https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/broadband/making-kent-quicker>

I attend as many of the local parish council meetings within my Division as I can – sometimes two in one evening – as well as the annual parish meetings. My most important role however is to help and support residents with their individual problems. The case work is varied - ranging from school appeals to care packages for our elderly residents, potholes to hedges etc – and it is always very rewarding to see positive outcomes. I am always happy to listen and help and can be contacted by either email or telephone – Shellina.Prendergast@kent.gov.uk or 07970 461160.

I am always very keen to support local community projects with my KCC Members Grant. Beneficiaries this past year include improvements to Filmer Hall in East Sutton, play equipment in Ulcombe and at Hollingbourne primary school, improved facilities at Headcorn Tennis Club, Five Acre Wood School, various highway schemes, Age UK Maidstone, Involve Kent, a youth project led by the Salvation Army and a memorial stone in Boughton Malherbe. I have several worthy projects in the pipeline for 2019/20 but please do let me know if there is anything within your community that I can help with.

Thank you again and my very best wishes to you all.

Shellina