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Dear Louise,

Report to Faversham Town Council

Thank you for the invitation to provide a report to the Town Council's meeting on recent matters that have arisen in my role at county councillor.

POLLUTION IN OSPRINGE (AND OTHER AIR QUALITY MONITORING AREAS)

At full meetings of the County Council each member can submit one question to the Executive. Since the local elections there has only been, sadly, one full council meeting (22 May 2025).

I used my question to raise the very concerning, long-standing issue of air pollution in Ospringe (and other areas of Kent). My question and the Leader's answer are shown below:

Question 11

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 22 May 2025

Question by Antony Hook to the Leader of Kent County Council

There are now 22 locations in Kent where air quality is so poor it is legally required to be monitored and there are many other locations where air quality is a concern to local people. Air pollution is estimated to cause 40,000 early deaths per year in the UK and costs the economy £20 billion.

Does the Leader agree that every person in Kent deserves to breathe clean air and will the new administration commit to take new action to improve air quality, whether that be KCC acting itself or do so in concert with other councils and agencies?

Answer

There is strong evidence associating air pollution with adverse health effects including development of coronary heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease, lung cancer and exacerbation of asthma (Public Health England, 2019).

Through the Environment Act (1995 and 2021) as a County Council we are required to proactively engage as soon as an air quality issue is identified with District Councils. District Councils are responsible for assessing local air quality including Annual Status Reports (ASRs), designating Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) and preparation of Air Quality Action Plans (AQAP).

The Environment Act 1995 requires us (KCC) to:

- Provide District Councils with proposals for particular measures we will take to contribute to the achievement and maintenance of Air Quality Objectives, including a date by which each measure will be carried out.
- Deliver the actions we are responsible for as set out in the Air Quality Action Plans, to the timescales defined
- Provide assistances to the District Council to coordinate action across neighbouring local authorities and with other public bodies

You will see that this this answer fails to commit to any new action and is little more than a statement of statutory duties. I will pursue updates on what is being done by KCC and others.

The Air Quality Action Plan is clearly an SBC as well as KCC plan and we need to push from all sides to get more done to reduce deadly air pollution in Ospringe.

JOINT TRANSPORT BOARD

I attended the Swale Joint Transport Board on 30 June 2025.

It was confirmed that a short double yellow line will be put on the corner at the south end of Park Road where the road turns into a car park at that end of the Rec (the car park near the bowling green and tennis courts). At the previous JTB meeting it looked like this would not be agreed to but I asked for the fire service to be consulted.

A fire engine went there and found their access impeded. They expressed a clear view that a double yellow line would help by protecting clear access to that end of the Rec. With this information, JTB agreed to support the double yellow line being created.

I asked about progress with the double yellow lines around the Guildhall as the JTB papers referred to "further consultation". It was reported that this referred to discussion with the Town Council about disabled spaces.

NEW PEDESTRIAN CROSSING FOR THE A2

I had a constructive further meeting with Kent Highways about this recently.

As some members of the Town Council are aware, a pedestrian crossing on London Road was due to be created near Egbert Road last Easter or this coming August. This was kiboshed by planning permission being given for a new vehicle crossing to be constructed for one of the two new bungalows being built on the corner of Egbert Road / London Road.

This is a case of one team at Kent Highways (who deal with vehicle crossing) not knowing what another team at Kent Highways is doing (trying to build a crossing) and I have complained about this at a senior level. I am assured there is recognition that this must not happen again.

At my most recent meeting a highways designer said it should still be possible to fit a crossing in around that location despite the extra driveway. There is also a location slightly to the west that may be possible.

Surveys of pedestrian and vehicle numbers will be carried out before the end of this school term which should support the case for a crossing.

At this time KCC are not open to discussing a crossing point nearer to Abbey School on the basis, stated before, that there is not enough space for this. This is not a view we all share, and I hope can be revisited again in future.

PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY BETWEEN UPPER ST ANNS ROAD AND KING GEORGE V FIELD

The Town Council will be very familiar with this path that is owned and maintained by Network Rail.

Councillor Ben Martin drew my attention to the fact this is not a registered public right of way, despite being used by the public for decades.

I have opened communications with the Public Rights of Way team at KCC. It may be possible to register this as a PROW. At their request I have written to Network Rail. I am told by the PROW teams that if NR agree it may be a relatively straightforward process to register a PROW. If they do not agree then it may still be possible but will be a longer process and we will have to collect evidence of public access.

BLUE BADGE DISABLED PARKING

KentOnline and others have drawn attention to the fact that some people with conditions that may not last for three years or more are being refused Blue Badges.

This includes, for example, people going through cancer treatment or other medical situations that may give them significant mobility problems.

I have raised this with KCC who say refusals reflect their compliance with the (somewhat complex) Blue Badge rules.

We need the rules to become more flexible for that badges can be issued to more people who can show they have a serious mobility issue.

I have proposed a motion to the next full Council (10 July) which you can read here [Motion 2 - Liberal Democrat Group - MTL D - Blue Badges.pdf](#).

It asks for KCC to lobby government for the rules (and underlying legislation) to change.

SMOKING CESSATION

For the next full county council, on Thursday (10 July 2025), I have submitted a question on smoking. The county council is the public health authority and, in that guise, has done a certain amount of work to help people stop smoking.

You can read more about this work here: [Quit smoking - Kent County Council](#)

Smoking kills thousands of people every year and is a huge strain on the health service and the economy.

I have submitted a question to ask the Executive to guarantee that they will not reduce the council's work to help people quit smoking.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

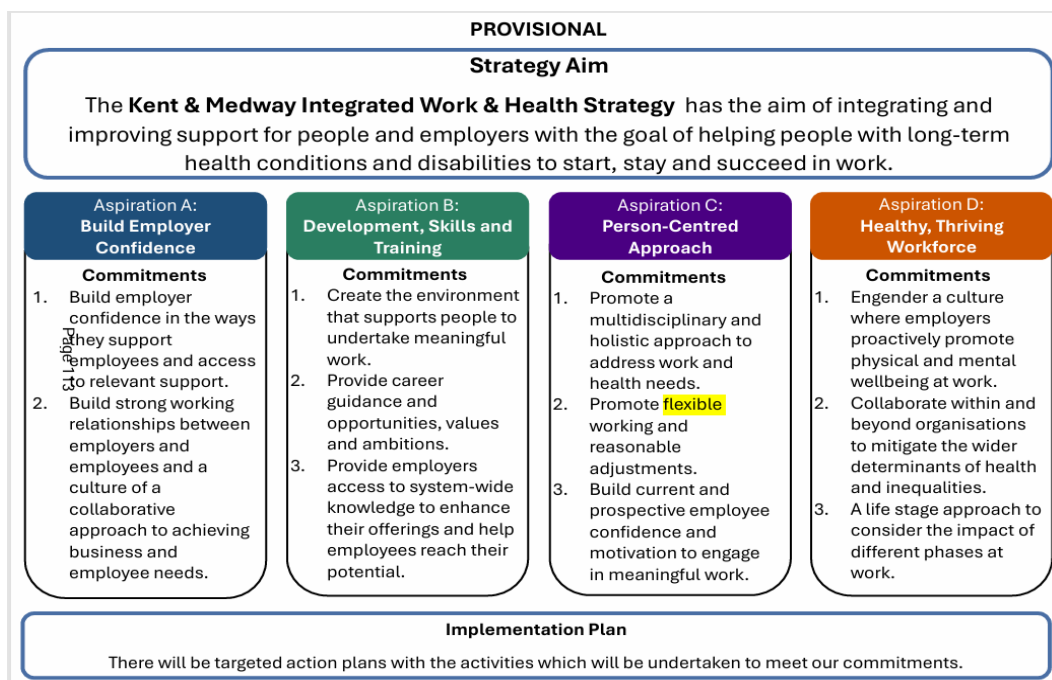
Faversham Town Council understands flexible working is an essential part of modern work and FTC uses flexible working effectively itself.

When the new Executive came to power its members made statements that were strongly hostile to flexible working. These remarks were harmful to KCC's recruitment and retention of staff, which is already very challenging, and therefore posed a risk to our delivery of services.

Staff have been advised that no changes are being made to flexible working patterns, which is a great relief.

In addition, despite the rhetoric against flexible working the council has signed up to a new Kent & Medway Integrated Work & Health Strategy. This is a very forward-thinking document that is about helping people with long-term conditions (whether physical or mental) to "start, stay and succeed" in work.

This includes a commitment to promoting flexible working and reasonable adjustments, which is good.



FLOOD RISK AND WATER MANAGEMENT

The county has a flood risk and water management committee. This finally had a meeting last week, the first since the new council was elected.

An update was received on warnings from the Met Office and others. You can read the paper [here](#).

The paper underlines how dry the weather has been recently and how important water conservation is. The Town Council should receive further updates about this from South East Water and the Council.

We need to build resilience to hot dry spells. At a household or community level more tree cover and household water butts would help.

CLEVE HILL

The proposed batteries for Cleve Hill are a real concern. The Town Council will be familiar with the recent open letter from the Faversham Future Group to our local MP about this ([The dangers of Lithium-ion Batteries - Faversham's Future](#)).

To date, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Swale Council and the Health & Safety Executive have all indicated they will not be in a position to properly evaluate or inspect the batteries as they lack the technical expertise for this specialised task.

Kent Fire Authority has a new Chair and new members since the local election.

I am preparing a letter to the new Chair requesting that the Authority work with the Chief Fire Officer to potentially acquire the necessary expertise to evaluate and inspect the safety of the proposed batteries. If there is a fire both residents and fire officers may be put in danger.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

In mid-May the County Council received a bad report by the CQC of its Adult Social Care provision.

ASC is important. People need good care and it accounts for 43% of the county council's budget.

We are pushing the Administration to present an action plan to address the issues in the report.

My group has made a balanced info-graphic to help people understand what the CQC identified:

Kent's Adult Social Care Crisis

A Visual Summary of the October 2024 CQC Assessment

Overall CQC Rating



Requires Improvement

10

Days to Screen Safeguarding Concerns
(Target: 24 Hours)

232

Maximum Days to Close a Safeguarding Case

600

People Stuck in Hospital Beds
Awaiting Social Care

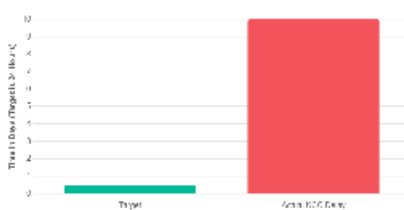
4,339

People Supported by Assistive Technology

A System Failing to Protect

Critical delays in adult safeguarding are putting vulnerable residents at unacceptable risk. The system is overwhelmed, with targets missed and backlogs growing.

Safeguarding Screening Times



Unresolved Safeguarding Cases

517

Concerns Awaiting Completion

These delays represent individuals living with unresolved risks. The disconnect between rising demand, staff shortages, and assessment delays creates a cycle of crisis.

The Impact on Our NHS

Poor integration between health and social care means hundreds of hospital beds are blocked, creating gridlock in the NHS and distress for patients fit for discharge.

~600

Patients in Hospital Beds Unnecessarily

Each number represents a person whose recovery is stalled, unable to return home or move to a more suitable care setting.

The Cycle of Delay

A lack of available and timely social care packages creates a bottleneck. The "Home First" approach is the goal, but without capacity in the community, it remains an ambition rather than a reality for many.

Patient is Medically Fit for Discharge



Assessment for Social Care is Delayed



No Suitable Care Package or Placement Available



Delayed Discharge & Blocked Hospital Bed

A Postcode Lottery of Care

While KCC reports enough care home places overall, the reality on the ground is starkly different. Availability and affordability vary dramatically, forcing residents away from their communities.

North Kent

Faces a critical shortage of **affordable** care options. Residents are often forced to move to less expensive areas like East Kent, separating them from family and support networks.

Isle of Sheppey

Has **zero** nursing homes. This complete lack of provision makes it impossible for residents needing higher levels of care to remain in their own community.

West Kent vs. East Kent

An imbalance in provision sees more nursing homes concentrated in West Kent, while other areas are underserved, highlighting inconsistent market management.

Pockets of Excellence

Despite systemic challenges, the CQC recognised several areas of strength and innovation within KCC's services.

Key Strengths Identified

- "Good" rating for Equity in Experience and Outcomes.
- "Good" rating for Learning, Improvement, and Innovation.
- Strong partnership working with health and community sectors.
- Recognition of unpaid carers' needs with separate support plans.
- Increased user choice through self-directed support tools.
- Improved transitions for young people moving to adult services.

Award-Winning Technology

The "Technology Enhanced Lives" service is a standout success.

4,339

People living more independently

Using sensors, monitors, and alarms to stay safe at home.

DEVOLUTION AND LGR

The Council is going to have a committee on Devolution and Local Government Reform, however at time of writing the Administration has cancelled the meeting due tomorrow without further date set.

This is a poor situation given the impending November deadline for proposals and I am pushing for a meeting. We may put it on the Scrutiny Committee agenda (which opposition groups can do) and have an extra meeting of Scrutiny in August to discuss LGR.

FLAGS

Flag flying at County Hall is decided by the Chairman of KCC. You will have seen the news that new Chairman Richard Palmer (Ref, Swale West) has directed, per the wishes of his party, that the Pride Flag and Ukraine flags will no longer be flown at County Hall.

This is a disgraceful decision and I have conveyed my view that the people of Faversham will strongly disagree with the exclusion of these flags.

Flying the Pride flag in June is a sign that an institution fosters tolerance and diversity. KCC began flying it in 2017 or 2018 after a proposal I made to the Monitoring Officer. Several staff at KCC told me that seeing up made them feel more welcome and safer at work.

Likewise, the Ukraine flag has been a positive signal that we support the people of Ukraine who have suffered an illegal, aggressive invasion. This is our “backyard”. Kyiv is only 24 hour by road from Kent. The Russian invasion has harmed everyone in Faversham by significantly increasing prices of energy and building materials. If Russia’s invasion is not defeated, then the ongoing danger posed to us and our interests will increase.

KCC’s previous strong support for Ukraine included an association agreement with a county in Ukraine, backed by all groups on KCC before the recent election. This strong support for Ukraine was matched by other local authorities across the UK and Europe. It was reported that this combined support had a very positive effect on Ukrainian morale.

I thank the Town Council for continuing to fly both the Pride flag and the Ukraine flag.

You appreciate that to understand what is happening on our doorstep we sometimes need to look over the horizon.

Conclusion

There are of course other issues I have been involved with. This report is a summary, which hopefully is helpful.

I am in regular contact with Town Council staff and councillors, who I am always pleased to work with. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

It is my absolute privilege to represent everyone in the town and to work with all of you at the Town Council.

**Antony Hook,
County Councillor for Faversham**