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Mrs L Bareham,
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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 since my last report.

BLUE BADGE REFORM

An issue I have been working on is improving the rules around blue badges. At present, a person must have certain benefits or show they have a disability that will last three years or more to qualify for a badge.

This excludes many people suffering a shorter-term but serious reduction on their mobility, such as some chemotherapy patients.

I have supported a campaign started by the KM group for this to be changed and took a motion to the full council to get KCC behind. The campaign is also supported by all Kent MPs.

Unfortunately, the Reform administration refused to support it and some KCC members called for the Blue Badge system "to be torn down".

However, I co-ordinated a letter to the DfT signed by 20 members of four other political groups on KCC and we have now been told a Minister will meet with us (the signatories of the letter) to discuss it.

VACCINES

I put a motion to the most recent full council calling on the council to support work by the Director of Public Health to promote vaccines and encourage people to follow their doctor's advice about what vaccines to receive. In particular, MMR take up rates have been falling and this poses a serious threat to the health of children.

I am pleased to report the motion passed. We need to spread good medical information about vaccines and challenge any misinformation.

SMOKING CESSATION

You may recall from a previous report that I tabled a question to full council on smoking cessation and whether KCC will continue to carry out the work it has done to promote help for people to stop smoking.

I am pleased to say my question extracted a commitment that this work will continue.

EDUCATION AND EXAM RESULTS

At the most recent full council I tabled a question on the summer exam results and particularly asked whether the national trend for boys to underperform compared to girls, why this is any what can be done about it.

To my considerable disappointment, the cabinet member for Education and Skills, was unable to tell me whether there is a disparity between boys and girls exam performance in Kent. This is a very shocking omission which I intend to pursue.

ACACIA COURT

A further stakeholder meeting took place recently.

It was reported that the centre continues to operate well in looking after unaccompanied refugee children for up to two weeks before they are looked after throughout the country.

The centre manager confirmed to me that a claim online that a young person from AC has been arrested is entirely false. The police were present and also confirmed this. Police have had concerns about people loitering around outside AC. This obviously poses a welfare concern with young people inside. There have been no issues from AC for the nearby school.

BUDGET CONSULTATION

A consultation on the KCC took place, that the Town Council will have been aware of (<https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/budget-consultation-2026-27>)

A draft budget should be published in November.

Recent media reports indicate the Administration will break its promise to cut council tax and will increase council tax by 5%, which is not helpful to people's household budgets.

EUROSTAR

I attended a 'summit' about restoring international rail services from Kent. This was attended by a Minister, council leaders, MPs, business leaders and others.

There is a possibility of providers other than Eurostar seeking to start running some services but there is nothing concrete. It is unlikely to be back up to the level of several services a day Kent had previously.

I have challenged the narrative that it is due to Covid. Covid is long gone. What remains is Brexit and the fact the many people who had reason to travel no longer do. British people have lost their right to work in the EU (or EU citizens to work here) so people who commuted weekly or otherwise on Eurostar have gone. Numbers of students from the EU are down 50%. Kent based professionals can no longer offer services as easily to clients they reached by Eurostar. These are the real problems that need to be addressed.

DEVOLUTION AND LGR

The Reform Administration is pursuing its own idea of one mega-council for Kent and Medway that will Hoover up all of the powers and roles of the current 14 councils.

I think the Town Council will not need me to set out why this is a terrible idea.

I opposed it in the Committee and put down an amendment so there was a vote. We will continue to oppose it. It will use up about £100,000 of KCC money to develop as a plan and will almost certainly be rejected by the government. We will continue to oppose it.

CLIMATE CHANGE

You may have heard the news that KCC voted to rescind its previous recognition of a Climate Emergency and stop pursuing Net Zero policies.

I and my colleagues strenuously opposed this. We know that Climate Change is a real and serious threat.

There has been no detailed paper published by the council so it is unclear at this stage what work will and will not be stopped specifically.

MENTAL HEALTH

Figures were produced which show the suicide rate in Kent is above the national average. I have asked officers about this and have been told their consideration that take-up of mental health support services is the thing to aim to improve.

CHARITIES

My position as a KCC appointed Trustee of the Bensted Trust expired at May. Local members would usually be re-appointed. The new council has failed to make an appointment to this or scores of other charities across Kent. This is deeply frustrating.

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**