

Kent County Council Official Opposition Newsletter

Updates and Analysis from the Official Opposition

Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of the Kent County Council (KCC) Official Opposition Newsletter, where your Official Opposition councillors offer an alternative perspective on the significant debates, decisions, and developments that affect our county. Our purpose is to hold the administration to account, amplify the voices of Kent's residents, and promote a vision of progressive, responsive governance. In this issue, we cover recent key council meetings, motions, committee reports, and the campaigns shaping your community.

Headlines from County Hall: Recent Debates and Decisions

Over the past three months, County Hall has witnessed lively debates and at times, sharp disagreement between the new Administration and the Official Opposition. Priority issues for our group have included the council's budgetary direction, the safeguarding of public services, and the pressing need for effective climate action.

Budget Scrutiny and Local Service Protection

The annual budget-setting process remains a focal point of robust challenge. The Official Opposition has expressed strong reservations about plans to reduce funding for adult social care, youth provisions, and essential support for children and families. There were £22M of savings that were not achieved last year which will have to be added to the £60M of planned savings for this year. While the administration frames such cuts as necessary responses to central government funding shortfalls, our members have emphasised that the most vulnerable in Kent should not be left to carry the burden.

Transparency and Accountability

A persistent concern in recent council sessions has been the need for increased openness in decision-making. Too often, in the last two months meetings have been cancelled or postponed, crucial documents published late, thus limiting the ability of non-administration councillors to scrutinise decisions. KCC elected a member of the opposition to chair the Scrutiny Committee. We believe in genuine transparency as the foundation of trust in local government.

Climate Emergency: From Declaration to Inaction

While Kent County Council has declared a climate emergency, the new administration has identified savings to be made in the delivery of our climate policies. The Official Opposition continues to press the administration to deliver concrete results. We have advocated for:

- Accelerated investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency across council assets.
- Specific targets and clear timelines for achieving net zero emissions.
- Enhanced support for parish councils and community-led environmental projects.

The recent delay to pivotal elements of the climate action plan has drawn further scrutiny from our group. We understand that Kent's future prosperity depends on urgent, effective environmental leadership.

Transport, Roads, and Active Travel

Transport remains one of the most frequent concerns raised by residents. The Official Opposition continues to campaign for improved public transport, safer roads, and better infrastructure for walking and cycling. Recent council meetings have featured:

- Demands for a review of bus service reductions that leave rural areas isolated.
- Calls for investment in rural transport solutions and community minibus initiatives.
- Proposals to expand 20mph speed zones in residential areas and near schools for safety.
- Support for sustained, predictable funding for active travel infrastructure.

We are committed to ensuring that Kent's transport network works for everyone.

Key Committee Reports

Children, Young People, and Education

Children and young people's welfare is a central concern for the Official Opposition. Our councillors have scrutinised the council's approaches to school admissions, special educational needs (SEND), and safeguarding, including:

- Highlighting unacceptable delays in support for children with SEND and demanding better funding and faster assessments.
- Defending vulnerable rural schools from closure.
- Promoting mental health support in schools, in partnership with the voluntary sector.

Adult Social Care and Health

Amid post-pandemic challenges and rising costs, adult social care remains under severe pressure. The county received a Requires Improvement order in the recent CQC inspection. The Official Opposition has:

- Opposed the closure of day centres and respite services.
- Challenged the use of costly agency staff in favour of investing in local carers.
- Advocated for higher pay for home care workers to recruit and retain the best professionals.
- Received a brief at the Scrutiny Committee on the Adult Social Care improvement plan

Our belief is unwavering: everyone deserves accessible, high-quality care in their community.

Environment and Highways

Recent extreme weather has underscored the need for resilient infrastructure. The Official Opposition has:

- Fought for better drainage and maintenance funding.
- Encouraged a county-wide tree-planting strategy.
- Stressed the importance of preserving biodiversity in planning decisions.

Supporting Kent's Economy

The Official Opposition recognises the challenges facing Kent's small businesses and local economies. We have called for:

- Targeted aid for businesses affected by the aftermath of the pandemic and Brexit.
- Expanded apprenticeships and skills training, especially in emerging green sectors.
- Stronger links between local employers, councils, and colleges to match skills with jobs.

Championing Equality and Inclusion

Our group remains committed to building a Kent where everyone is empowered to succeed. We have advocated for:

- Expanded support for refugees and asylum seekers, ensuring fair access to services.
- Action on digital exclusion, particularly for older or rural residents.

- Initiatives to counter violence against women and girls, in partnership with police and community groups.

Holding the Council to Account: Questions and Motions

The Official Opposition has tabled questions and motions on key topics such as road safety and financial transparency. Recent highlights include:

- A motion seeking full council support for more efficient a more efficient Disabled parking service and to widen access to those undergoing treatment.
- Questions about the council's readiness for extreme weather.
- Requests for a review of underused council properties and assets.
- Getting a reassurance that the council Tips will not close.

Get Involved

We recognise that the new administration has a mandate to govern but we also have a mandate to hold them to account for those decisions. We encourage residents to stay involved in the issues that affect our communities. Whether through campaigns, council meetings, or conversations with your councillors, your voice is essential in shaping Kent's future.

Together, we can ensure Kent remains welcoming, vibrant, and resilient—a county of opportunity for all. Thank you for your continued interest and engagement. A three hundred word version of this news letter is available below for publication in Parish magazines and on village pages and websites.

Until next time, we remain your voice at County Hall—dedicated to standing up for Kent.

Welcome to the latest edition of the Kent County Council (KCC) Official Opposition Newsletter. This issue provides an alternative perspective on significant debates, decisions, and developments affecting Kent. The Official Opposition aims to hold the administration accountable, amplify residents' voices, and promote progressive governance.

Recent Debates and Decisions: Over the past three months, County Hall has seen lively debates between the new ReformUK administration and the Official Opposition. Key issues include budgetary direction, safeguarding public services, and climate action.

Budget Scrutiny: The Official Opposition has expressed strong reservations about plans to reduce funding for adult social care, youth provisions, and essential support for children and families. They emphasize that the most vulnerable should not bear the burden of budget cuts

Children, Young People, and Education: The welfare of children and young people is a central concern. The Official Opposition has scrutinized school admissions, special educational needs (SEND), and safeguarding. They highlight delays in support for children with SEND and defend vulnerable rural schools from closure

Adult Social Care and Health: Amid post-pandemic challenges, adult social care remains under pressure. The Official Opposition opposes the closure of day centers and respite services and challenges the use of costly agency staff

Environment and Highways: Recent extreme weather underscores the need for resilient infrastructure. The Official Opposition fights for better drainage and maintenance funding and advocates for higher pay for home care workers

Climate Emergency: The Official Opposition presses the administration to deliver concrete results on climate policies. They advocate for accelerated investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency

Transport, Roads, and Active Travel: Transport remains a frequent concern. The Official Opposition campaigns for improved public transport, safer roads, and better infrastructure for walking and cycling

Transparency and Accountability: The need for increased openness in decision-making is a persistent concern. The Official Opposition believes in genuine transparency as the foundation of trust in local government