

Report from Cllr. David Wimble

Kent County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment

To: Division Councils of Romney Marsh

October 2025

As we move into the third quarter of this financial year, much of our attention has turned to the considerable task of preparing the 2025/26 budget. As with any budget, it is about striking a careful balance between what is *statutory* and what is *necessary*.

When we took office, Kent County Council faced a £720 million deficit. Since then, we have worked tirelessly to bring the Council back onto a more stable, balanced footing. This has required some very tough decisions, and there are more still to come.

With increases to both the National Minimum Wage and National Insurance contributions impacting many of our external contracts, combined with current inflation running at around 4%, we face an estimated 7% additional spend next year simply to maintain existing services.

As many will know, councils are limited to a 5% increase in Council Tax without triggering a public referendum. While every 1% rise brings in approximately £10 million, it is worth remembering that KCC's overall budget stands at around £2.4 billion — the largest of any county authority in the country. The real challenge, therefore, lies in identifying genuine savings.

Much of the so-called "low-hanging fruit" has already been picked over recent years, and with reserves having been used previously to balance budgets, it would be financially irresponsible to rely on them again.

Environmental Portfolio Updates

Over the past two years, approximately £800,000 has been spent on restoring some of the eight historic windmills under KCC's stewardship. I am determined to ensure that, as we move towards Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), these important heritage assets remain in the hands of the Kent people. To that end, I have been developing the *Kent Community Windmill Trust*, which will see these sites transferred to their local communities under 999-year leases, ensuring they cannot be sold for commercial gain.

I have also been working with Folkestone College and other local colleges to create apprenticeship opportunities, helping to increase youth employment across the county.

On the energy front, I have held meetings with our local MP at Portcullis House in Westminster and with officials from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

regarding large-scale solar development on greenfield sites. We have now formally rescinded the previous “Climate Emergency” declaration, allowing us to fight these developments on a net-zero policy basis. KCC remains firmly opposed to both greenfield solar and large battery storage schemes, instead promoting a *brownfield and rooftop solar strategy*, where the benefits go directly to local property owners rather than international investors.

At a local level, the rescindment of the Climate Emergency policy will also simplify procurement. Small and medium-sized businesses will no longer be required to meet unrealistic net-zero or biodiversity obligations to work with the Council. This change will allow us to work more effectively with local firms — rather than large multinationals — and could save up to £45 million over the next five years, without compromising on service quality.

Local Engagement and Initiatives

Over the past five weeks, I have held open surgeries in New Romney, Lydd, Brookland, and St Mary’s Bay, listening directly to residents’ concerns.

Next month, once the latest Environment Agency and Southern Water test results are published, we will host a *Kent Water Quality Summit* — hopefully in our new New Romney Community Centre. This will be the first meeting to bring together all key stakeholders, including the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Affinity Water, DEFRA, NFU, local councils, coastal MPs, and internal drainage boards.

This will not be a “talking shop”, but a working summit with a clear, measurable action plan over a 12-month period to deliver real improvements in water quality.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Finally, I continue to sit on the LGR committee. This process, if mishandled, could have serious implications for local authorities, particularly with the risk of replicating existing costs and budgets — including those within my own waste portfolio.

KCC will be submitting a proposal for a *single county-wide unitary authority*, a model that, while politically controversial, is supported by many local authority Chief Executives as the most efficient and financially sustainable option for Kent’s future.

Cllr. David Wimble

Cabinet Member for the Environment
Kent County Council