



Shellina Prendergast – Maidstone Rural East

Update February 2025

Dear Residents,

Devolution - Many of you have been in touch in recent weeks regarding the Government's proposals on decision making powers moving away from Whitehall and out into the regions as outlined in the English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024. In this White Paper, Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister, set out a vision for restructured local government and more elected Mayors across England.

Leaders across Kent – Kent County Council, Medway Council and all 12 District and Borough Councils in the county – submitted an expression of interest just after the general election in July 2024 to the Deputy Prime Minister, telling her they were keen to work collaboratively as a group, and with Government, to shape an innovative and comprehensive devolution for Kent and Medway. On 9th January, 2025, Kent County Council Cabinet Members agreed to ask for Kent and Medway to be considered for inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) by submitting a letter to Jim McMahon OBE, Minister for Local Government and Devolution.

However on Wednesday 5th February, the Leaders of Kent County Council and Medway Council were informed by Jim McMahon that the bid to be part of the DPP had not been successful. To quote the Leader of Kent County Council – “the reason we have been given is both confusing and insufficient and we will be seeking more detail from Ministers as to the rationale as soon as possible”.

Like many of my colleagues at Kent County Council, I share the Leader's disappointment that residents and businesses of Kent have been let down by the Government and will not be able to benefit from the increased monies, powers and opportunities promised through devolution. These include economic growth, housing and transport which are all vital for our residents in Kent.

Following this announcement, the Government has formally invited all those not involved in the DPP to submit a further proposal for local government reorganisation by 21st March 2025. I will, of course, keep you updated on developments over the next few months. In the meantime, it is and always has been business as usual in serving the best interests of all our communities in Kent.

Budget – On Thursday 13th February, Members of Kent County Council will meet to set the budget for 2025/26. This article from the County Council's Network [County Councils Network responds to final Local Government Finance Settlement - County Councils Network](#) will give you some indication of the challenges being faced by County Councils across the country and Kent County Council is no exception. There will undoubtedly be many tough decisions to make but I know that we will endeavour to continue to provide the best services possible within our

extremely constrained financial envelope for our communities. I will, of course, provide an update on the outcome following the meeting later this week.

Streetworks – the single biggest item in my inbox and a significant area of concern for residents is the disruption to day-to-day journeys caused by what seems to be a never-ending series of streetworks on our roads and the overuse of emergency permits by utility companies. It is also a concern for Kent County Council in terms of the impact on the structural integrity of the highway and any subsequent cost to the taxpayer to carry out the repairs.

In 2023/24, 29% of all permits for works on Kent's Road network were for emergency (immediate) works. Consequently we have no opportunity to carry out our coordination function or ensure the proper planning of these street works. We, like other Highway Authorities, have found that often these works need not be carried out on an emergency basis (for example, to repair a water leak that has been ongoing for some time) but that the permit system is too open to improper use of this category.

Kent County Council – both Members and Officers – has been working tirelessly to address these issues which require changes to primary legislation by Parliament. Part of this work has been raising awareness of the impacts of works on the highway network undertaken by the utility companies and a recent submission to the Transport Select Committee can be found here - <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/136070/pdf/>

A key recommendation in our evidence is that there is a change to the definition of 'emergency' works so that we have the best opportunity to enact our Traffic Management Duty and the evidence recommends how the management of these works could be improved. This includes further research into the economic and societal impacts of both street works and road works to determine if there is a case for changes to working practices to be mandated. This would be justified where the economic benefits of reducing street works/road works duration outweighs the costs of undertaking works more quickly and Kent County Council would welcome the opportunity of a pilot to support this research.

This has been shared with all our Kent MPs to seek their support. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the points raised with you to support our efforts on this front and would encourage you to do the same with our MPs to seek their commitment on seeking change on a matter that has a significant impact on our lives in so many ways.

I hope you will find this update useful and please do let me know if you require any further information or assistance on the above or other matters – I can be contacted via email at Shellina.Prendergast@kent.gov.uk or telephone on 0300 042 1591.

With my very best wishes

Shellina