



Direct Dial/Ext: 03000416892
e-mail: joel.cook@kent.gov.uk
Ask for: Joel Cook
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Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 10 JULY 2025

Agenda Item No

6

County Council Questions (Pages 1 - 22)

Yours sincerely

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Benjamin Watts
General Counsel

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Question 1

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Mark Hood, Member for Tonbridge,
to Linden Kemkaren, Leader of the Council**

Since January, the substantive discussions relating to devolution and Local Government Re-organisation have only involved the leaders of Kent's 14 upper and second tier councils. So far, the views of Members and residents have not been sought in any meaningful way.

Our leaders seem to have already conceded that the price of devolution is an unaccountable elected Mayor who will have sole control over an enormous budget with powers over strategic planning, environment and transport. There is a lot that needs to be discussed about the future of Kent's Devolution and LGR arrangements before decisions are made and I want the residents of our great County to have their say.

The Leader wrote to the Minister earlier this year, stating; "Appropriate engagement with residents on future local government structures in a county region of almost 1.9m people is a huge undertaking, and to do it meaningfully will require time over the summer...".

Can the Leader explain how she intends to involve and engage the public and clarify how this will be paid for?

Answer

I thank Mr Hood for his question. I wrote to Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon on 5th June requesting an extension to the deadline for full proposals for local government reorganisation.

It was clear to me from the moment I was first briefed on the issue that the 28 November submission deadline was a ridiculously short space of time to do all the work necessary and then meaningfully consult Kent residents. Hence my very reasonable request to the Minister for a short delay to 31 March 2026.

As has been widely reported, the Minister has rejected my request for an extension. My administration will do all we can in the time available to raise awareness of local government reorganisation with the residents of Kent and Medway, including by bringing the issue transparently into the public domain through the new Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee that we have established.

But, to be very clear, the timetable is being imposed on us by Government for its own benefit, not for the benefit of Kent councils, Kent residents or local Kent communities.

And whilst discussions have naturally been ongoing at Kent Council Leaders with the Leaders of Medway Council and the 12 Districts and Borough Councils, Kent Council Leaders is an informal group. Any decision-making on this or any other matter would always take place openly through each of the sovereign Councils according to individual constitutions.

I am committed to campaigning against the imposition of local government reorganisation on Kent and raising public awareness of the risk and challenges it presents. Whilst no structure or council is perfect, Kent has a strategic local authority with a strong identity in KCC and 12 District and Borough Councils that are perfectly capable of representing local views and delivering community services.

I am further considering what engagement and consultation may be appropriate *after* the 28 November submission deadline. I will keep the County Council's options open on what public engagement may be necessary ahead of, or after, any Ministerial decision on reorganisation proposals in Spring 2026.

This includes the *possibility* of a referendum on the matter. But I would not take the decision to call a referendum on local government reorganisation lightly, given the significant additional cost to the Kent taxpayer.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Stuart Jeffery, Member for Maidstone Central,
to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of Kent County Council**

Thirty years ago this year, world leaders made a promise at the Fourth World Conference on Women to bring equal rights, opportunities, power, and safety for women and girls everywhere so I really welcome the fact that we now have a woman leader among the Kent Council leaders, providing some much needed gender balance. Can the Leader of the Council therefore set out her position on Violence Against Women and Girls, how her administration will be enhancing Kent County Council's role in community protection and how they intend to tackle misogyny at every opportunity?

Answer

I thank my friend opposite for welcoming me as leader. I must correct him though when he mentions that I provide some "much needed gender balance" although naturally I'm pleased to be of such service to him.

I fear that my friend is confusing sex and gender, a sadly common mistake that has led us into all sorts of odd places. But more on that in a moment.

There has been a terrifying rise in crimes associated with male violence against women and girls. There's been a 37% increase between 2018 and 2023 leading to the National Police Chief's Council describing it as an "epidemic".

It goes without saying that of course, I am totally in favour of preventing violence against women and girls wherever possible.

However – there are two rather large elephants in the room and it would be remiss of me not to refer to them in answering my friend's question.

With alarming regularity here in Kent, hundreds, if not thousands of undocumented young males invade our County via the small boats across the channel. Thanks to figures published by the Centre for Migration Control and using data from police forces, the home Office and the Office for National Statistics, we now know that foreigners are three-and-a-half times more likely to be arrested for sex offences against women and girls, than their British-born counterparts.

The publication of migrant crime statistics was not available until very recently, and it has been most illuminating, albeit in a very depressing way. I would suggest that until the government finds its backbone and comes up with a plan to deter these hordes of men, from deeply misogynistic and dare I say, unenlightened cultures from invading our county, women and girls in Kent will continue to be in grave danger of violence and sexual abuse.

The second elephant in the room is that even today, there are people, politicians even, who seem not to know what a woman is. Some of our elected representatives at the highest levels recently needed five Supreme Court judges to tell them that sex is biological

and women must, under the law, be defined by that and not 'gender' which as we know is simply a societal construct surrounding behaviour and appearance.

Even after this landmark ruling, there are still politicians who insist that a man can somehow magically turn into a woman if he wears a wig and a skirt.

So I say to my friend opposite that while I applaud his enthusiasm for safeguarding women and girls, while these two elephants are rampaging about, unchecked by central government policy, we don't really stand a chance do we?

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Alister Brady, Member for Canterbury City North,
to Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

During the election, Reform UK candidates, including the now current Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, campaigned on the need to fix potholes.

Now he oversees this portfolio, can the Cabinet Member explain what will be done differently or is he continuing with the Tory Administration's policies.

Answer

Thank you for your question. We are developing our new pro-active and long-term approach to Reforming Kent's Roads moving away from the previously reactive and short-term blitz campaigns that offered no lasting solutions.

Reforming Kent's Roads will prioritise long-term planning over quick fixes. Resources will be allocated not just to repair existing damage but to enhance the overall quality and durability of the roads. This forward-thinking approach ensures that roads are built and maintained to withstand the test of time and usage.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Richard Streatfeild, Member for Sevenoaks Town,
to Brian Collins, Deputy Leader**

Residents in Sevenoaks and across Kent will be wondering how the new Administration is going to make sure that the County remains on a sound financial footing.

Can the Deputy Leader tell us how many of last year's savings were unrealised and whether the new Administration has been able to stick to the budget in the first quarter? In answering could he in particular confirm the cost of demand pressure in adult social care in the first quarter, as a key spend area?

Answer

The 2024-25 budget included the requirement to deliver savings and additional income of £111m, including previous years undelivered savings. In total, £73m of savings and additional income was achieved in 2024-25. £22m of undelivered savings are expected to be achieved in this year and beyond. Details of the outturn position will be presented to Cabinet later this month and the draft Statement of Accounts was published for public inspection on 30th June in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

It's too early to take a view on Quarter 1, including demand pressures in adult social care, as 30 June has only just passed. As usual, the quarter one financial report will be considered at Cabinet in September. But as a reminder, the Adult Social Care and Health 2025-26 budget included £88m of spending growth (including £28m for provider fee uplifts and £35m of other forecast cost and demand increases) and £44m for existing and new savings and income, as well as the £22m savings rephased from the previous year.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Mike Sole, Member for Canterbury South,
to Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Kent residents applying for, or renewing a Blue Badge are told that processing can take up to four months. Hundreds of residents have to wait even longer leaving them without a valid blue badge which can have a significant impact on their lives. Many other County Councils are able to process applications in a much more timely manner, with twelve weeks being regularly quoted, but others like Liberal Democrat controlled Cambridgeshire County Council processing within four weeks.

Will the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health explain why KCC has such lengthy processing times and can they comment on whether allocating additional resources would improve response times?

Answer

Thank you, Mr. Sole, for your question. I'd like to provide the following response regarding Blue Badge processing times in Kent.

Firstly, I fully acknowledge the frustration these delays can cause. For many residents, a Blue Badge is not just a convenience – it is a vital tool for maintaining independence and accessing essential services.

As I understand it, we are now experiencing unprecedented demand for Blue Badges. In the last year alone, we received over 44,000 applications. This volume has placed considerable strain on the current system.

I have personally requested a number of improvements, including enhancements to the website to help applicants better understand the process and expectations. Operationally, we are also reviewing how applications are managed, with a view to improving efficiency.

One area I believe will make a significant difference is the removal of mandatory assessments for individuals with long-term conditions who receive Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This change – part of the recent Benefits Bill at Westminster – is very welcome and will free up time and resources for our assessment teams and make it quicker for those residents with long-term conditions.

Based on the full calendar year of 2024, 42% of all completed applications were processed within 15 working days of submission. Currently, the average processing time is around 4 weeks for those who are automatically eligible, and up to 4 months for those requiring further assessment.

There are a small percentage of applications that are taking longer than 4 months, and we recognise the anxiety this can cause. To help address this, we have added additional workforce capacity and have been prioritising people who have been waiting the longest.

As a result, both the waiting list and the overall processing time are beginning to come down.

Applicants who are not automatically eligible often need to provide further evidence. In some instances, a telephone or face-to-face assessment is required, which we arrange at a mutually convenient time. These necessary steps, while time-consuming, are essential for fairness and compliance.

Additionally, we must be extremely diligent, as the Blue Badge scheme is recognised as one of the highest-risk areas for fraud in local government. Ensuring that each badge is issued appropriately is not only about service efficiency but also about protecting the integrity of the system and ensuring support goes to those who genuinely need it.

On the matter of resourcing:

We believe that increased investment – in both staffing and system improvements – can help reduce waiting times. That said, we do not receive any ring-fenced funding for this service, which we deliver on behalf of the Department for Transport. The service is funded by Kent council taxpayers, along with a notional £10 charge that contributes to the cost of the badge and administration.

Kent County Council must operate within the national legal framework for Blue Badge delivery, as set by the Department for Transport.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Paul Stepto, Member for Tonbridge,
to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of Kent County Council**

On the evening of 1st June, Zia Yusuf posted on X a copy of a letter addressed to 'to whom it may concern' and announcing that the 'DOGE team' was to arrive at County Hall on the following day. This letter was signed by Mr Yusuf, Nigel Farage and Linden Kemkaran. On 2nd June, the 'DOGE team' duly arrived at Sessions House, accompanied by Mr Yusuf and Aaron Banks. Can the Leader of the Council please explain why the letter included the signatures of Mr Farage and Mr Yusuf and what powers or responsibilities she believes they hold in relation to KCC? In answering, could the Leader confirm that the Chief Executive received the letter prior to it being tweeted?

Answer

I'd like to thank the member for Tonbridge for taking such interest in Reform UK's social media.

I was very pleased to sign a letter, the final version of which was not seen by my Chief Executive, that kickstarted the DOGE process, alongside the former Chairman and the Leader of my party who helped us win such a stonking majority on this council in May of this year.

The letter requested cooperation which I would expect from all KCC officers. I appreciate his party leaders wouldn't necessarily take such an interest in local government, because if they did, perhaps they wouldn't be sitting in opposition.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Stuart Heaver, Member for Whitstable West,
to Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

On 14 May this year, a teenage schoolgirl was hit by a car and injured in road traffic accident near a busy roundabout in my division, Whitstable West. It was a timely reminder that with forty-three fatalities on Kent roads last year, as well as many hundreds of serious injuries, there remains more to be done if Kent County Council is to reach its target of zero fatalities by 2050.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport please assure Kent residents that the administration's apparent enthusiasm for fixing potholes will not jeopardise essential budgets for investment and road improvements related to highway safety, and in particular around schools and public transport hubs?

Answer

I am sorry to hear about this incident, I hope the young lady is recovering well. As the responsible Highways authority, we are acutely aware of our duty to protect all road users. Our administration is dedicated to reviewing all activity budgets comprehensively to ensure that every penny spent delivers the best value for money for Kent residents.

This includes balancing the need for regular road maintenance with the imperative of investing in critical safety enhancements and as such we will continue to allocate resources effectively, ensuring that road safety around schools and public transport hubs receives the attention and funding it requires.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Sarah Hudson, Member for Malling Rural East,
to Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

The 12 week closure of Bow Road, Watlington by SGN for gas works is causing significant disruption to residents in the village and neighbouring communities. For the past 3 months I have been liaising with KCC Streetworks to ask for a hard road closure close to the junction of Pizien Well Road, Park Road and Gibbs Hill to prevent rat-running traffic from using narrow single track lanes in rural countryside, instead of the official diversion. At the time of writing, no hard road closure is in place. Residents are feeling let down by the failure of KCC to respect their wishes and introduce a hard road closure.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explain what the requirements are for securing hard road closures based on resident requests so that residents can be clear about what KCC will and will not do in these circumstances?

Answer

It is not standard practice to close a public highway solely at the request of residents. Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders to prohibit traffic are issued only when necessary and to ensure the safety of the workforce and road users during the works. That said, we understand the impact such works can have on local communities and will always explore alternative options and mitigation measures to minimise disruption.

Regarding Bow Road, our Senior Street Works Coordinator, has already implemented several measures to help reduce the impact of these essential SGN works.

Pizien Well Road is now subject to a hard closure. The Co-ordinator spent considerable time on site on Monday, 30th June, and observed minimal traffic using Gibbs Hill or Park Road. Based on these observations, KCC is of the view that further restrictions would be unnecessary and potentially disruptive.

I can confirm that specialist signs have been deployed advising that the B2015 Bow Road is closed with no access to the A26 at:

- A228 Seven Mile Lane (on approach to the B2015)
- B2015 Maidstone Road junction with the B2162 Hampstead Lane

Additionally, "Not Suitable For Diverted Traffic" signs have been placed at:
A26 Tonbridge Road junction with Old Road
A26 Tonbridge Road junction with Pizien Well Road
A228 Seven Mile Lane junction with Royden Hall Road
B2015 Nettlestead Road junction with Gibbs Hill
Park Road junction with Pizien Well Road

The Street Works inspector is conducting regular site visits and has confirmed that all additional signage has been installed.

In addition to your question I understand that officers were in touch with you yesterday to make further improvements at this complex location.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Antony Hook, Member for Faversham,
to Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Smoking kills thousands of people every year in Kent and is described by the Kent Public Health Observatory as “the primary cause of preventable illness morbidity and premature death.”

Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health update the council on the work the Council does to help people stop smoking, what the current KCC expenditure is on this, and how the effectiveness of our activity is measured?

Answer

Kent's stop smoking services deliver support in a range of different ways to suit the varying needs of our communities. Evidence-based behavioural support is offered in group settings, drop-in clinics and one to one sessions either face to face, by telephone and virtual Teams or Zoom meetings. In addition, treatment aids, such as Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), e-cigarettes or pharmacotherapy are offered to help maximise the smoker's chance of quitting. A full stop smoking programme typically lasts for 7 weeks but can be extended to 12 weeks if need be.

In 2024/25, the government introduced Local Stop Smoking Service (LSSS) Grants to all local authorities to boost core funding and increase the numbers of smokers attempting to quit through locally commissioned services. This is a five-year funding commitment to amplify the impact of local services. Kent's additional grant allocation for 2024/25 was £1.94m with a target to reach a total of 6,252 set quit dates in that year overall including the services already commissioned from the core budget. A Set Quit Date is the national measure of quit attempts made through local stop smoking services. The core budget for stop smoking services in 2024/25 was approximately £2.3m. The target was achieved with 6,427 Set Quit Dates and 3,736 successful 4-week quits (58% success rate). This is an increase of 23% Set Quit Dates and 30% 4-week quits on the previous year. This year the funding is slightly less at 1.89m.

Should you wish you have a fuller explanation I would be happy to provide you with a detailed picture in writing following today's meeting.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Geoffrey Samme, Member for Maidstone Rural North East,
to Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

The government is set to abolish care work visas for people coming to the UK.

Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health say what the impact of that policy will be on our Adult Social Care arrangements in Kent and can they provide any assurance as to the work that will be undertaken to manage risks on service provision arising from staffing problems?

Answer

Thank you for your question

In May of this year the new immigration bill set down plans to reduce health and social care visas to the United Kingdom. There was no formal consultation with the social care sector. There was notice of transitional arrangements until 2028.

However on July 1st the Home office announced on their website that the basic social care visa would be abolished on July 22nd 2025. Kent County Council and providers were and still haven't been formally notified of this change.

There are many areas that this could impact including our own services and our provider network that we commission with.

Across the contracts for ASCH services there are approximately 150 providers we are aware of who have Sponsorship licences. Our contracts require all commissioned services ensure they can deliver the required services and have business continuity plans in place and communicate any difficulties relating to service delivery. We will also look to have our own contingency plans in place.

There are a number of displaced social care workers who may have lost their jobs or the sponsoring provider has lost their licence. Kent Integrated Care Alliance (KICA) has advised us that the Government have ringfenced 2 million for the south east so providers could pick up these displaced people and get them into work. They would receive 5k each however in 3 years time or when the visa expires they are currently expected to pay the care worker 41k a year. This is 10k more than on a band 5 Nurse.

This is totally unsustainable and the risk is that many care workers at this level will go home and leave providers on a cliff edge.

This is obviously a national issue *[about which I have asked the Leader to write to the Health & Social Care Secretary]* and it is probably too early to describe the long term impact on ASCH, however we will liaise with the Kent Integrated Care Alliance to support the market through any challenges and difficulties that may emerge due to these changes.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Alex Ricketts, Member for Canterbury North,
to Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

KCC is one of the partners involved in the management and delivery of Operation Brock. Various Reform Branches and indeed some Cabinet Members have spoken out against Operation Brock.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways please tell the Council whether he thinks that Operation Brock is necessary or if he has any plans to, as some of his colleagues have called for, 'scrap it.'

Answer

Until the government find an alternative solution, Operation Brock is necessary to keep Kent moving. Whilst when in operation it causes delays to traffic on the M20 between Ashford and Maidstone, the impact on Kent residents and businesses would be far greater without it. Op Brock acts as a pressure valve to control the flow of EU bound freight to the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel when there are delays to traffic leaving the country. The port in particular is prone to traffic queuing on the Kent roads at busy times, if Op Brock were not there to control the flow of HGVs heading to mainland Europe, those HGVs would queue on the roads in and around Dover, also impacting Folkestone, Hythe and Hawkinge.

Over the weekend of 23/24th May, there were over 500 HGVs queued between Folkestone & Dover due to the high tourist numbers being processed in the port. In addition, there were over 400 HGVs held in Brock. Had Brock not been in place, those HGVs would have added to the queue at Folkestone, and the queue would have extended past Junction 11A, blocking access to Eurotunnel. Once the entrance to Eurotunnel is also blocked, the M20 becomes gridlocked with all traffic on the coastbound carriageway and is likely to queue back to Ashford, having a detrimental effect on the William Harvey Hospital and other major NHS facilities.

That said, we remain committed to finding a better solution and the Leader has been lobbying government on behalf of Kent's communities and road users and is actively looking for a viable alternative.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by John Moreland, Member for Tunbridge Wells West,
to Mary Laws, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services**

Can the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, as the Lead Member for Kent Police, explain whether the Council has reviewed and been able to assess what impact there will be on KCC services, such as Community Wardens and our work on the prevention of domestic abuse, caused by the proposed closure of the police custody suite at Maidstone.

Answer

On 8 May 2025, Kent Children Services were informed that Kent Police undertook a review of the custody provision across the force area. Kent Police informed that currently the total cell capacity across the force exceeds operational requirements, with a significant proportion of cell space regularly going unused.

As part of this review, Kent Police are proposing the closure of the custody suite at Maidstone Police Station later this year, subject to a full consultation process. Kent Police reports that the demand currently managed at Maidstone can be effectively absorbed by facilities in Tonbridge, Ashford, and Medway.

Whilst Kent's services rely on close coordination with local policing we have been assured by Kent Police that there will be no reduction in service for victims of abuse, and decisions to arrest and detain domestic abuse perpetrators will remain unchanged by the closure. The custody suite itself will not be open which will mean prisoners will be taken to other stations elsewhere in the county. However, the response and investigative teams will all remain in Maidstone and will continue to investigate locally.

Our Community Wardens are a preventative service based in the communities they serve. They are not involved in law enforcement and have no role in arresting people or using custody facilities. As such the suggested closure of these facilities in Maidstone will have no impact on service delivery. The relationship between the Community Wardens and Kent Police is a strong one and we look forward to continuing to work closely to ensure safe, thriving communities.

The Children Youth Justice service anticipates that practitioners will have to travel further to support children who had been arrested in Maidstone and are held in custody suites across the county. The closure will likely lead to a loss of time away from engaging with children due to more time spent driving and increased costs.

The impact on children and families will be similar in terms of greater costs to travel across the county and it will likely mean that for those children who live in poverty their parents will be less likely to afford the travel costs and therefore act as appropriate adults for them. We anticipate that this might lead to an increase demand for volunteers to act as appropriate adults for children.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Mark Ellis, Member for Tunbridge Wells,
to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of Council**

Members and residents of Kent will have read and heard that Mr. Zia Yusuf, an unelected individual linked to the national Political Party Reform UK and therefore has no official Council position, has made several demonstrably false public claims about KCC's finances - including claiming KCC spent £100 million on 'work from home infrastructure' when no such expenditure exists in our budget, alleging KCC has an 'asylum seeker leisure budget' when asylum-related expenditure is for the statutory care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and is fully reimbursed by the Home Office, and describing our £350 million Southern Construction Framework as a 'procurement racket' when it's a legitimate national framework that we host for 17 other councils. These false statements damage confidence in the organisation and risk making the management of the Council more difficult.

Can the Leader explain, given her portfolio responsibilities for Communications, why she has not publicly corrected these statements? In particular, can she confirm whether it is because she thinks the National Reform UK party, rather than her own Group, are in charge of the Council?

Answer

Zia Yusuf has performed a useful supporting role in highlighting the general use and abuse of tax-payers money in funding illegal migrants. Something that we, as a country cannot afford, and something that the public is heartily sick of.

This is one of the main reasons that the voters in Kent turned out in such large numbers on May the 1st to vote for Reform, a party that will not shy away from exposing how the taxpayers' hard-earned cash is being spent.

And I can reassure my friend opposite that there is absolutely no doubt who is in charge of this council.

You're looking at her.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Trudy Dean, Member for Malling Central,
to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of Council**

In the last few months of the former County Council, the Administration with all party support, indicated support on two issues relating to Kent's Countryside.

One was a motion to write in opposition to Government proposals to apply inheritance tax to farmers, including suggestions that it might alternatively be disapplied to existing farmers for seven years to allow adequate succession planning. The other was a positive response to a County Council Question relating to working with District and Borough Councils to monitor the amount of Kent grade 1 to 3 (good to excellent) agricultural land being lost to built development, including by means of the emerging Multifunctional Land Use Framework.

Will the Leader please say whether the current administration will continue to support these positions of work so crucial to the protection of food security, valuable agricultural soils and countryside?

Answer

I thank my friend opposite for her question and I'd like to reiterate my support for our farmers and landowners in Kent.

To that end I have written to the Chancellor to make her aware in the strongest possible terms, just how damaging and wrong her tax raid on farmers really is.

I have asked that she urgently rethinks her punitive family farm tax grab which will affect thousands of farmers here in Kent.

There is something very rotten at the core of this Labour government that it seeks to throw money at illegal migrants and welfare claimants while committing daylight robbery on our farmers who work 7 days a week, 365 days a year in all weathers to put food on our plates and milk in our tea.

I will always stand up for farmers and agricultural workers because I can see how important food security is – and what a hard and thankless task farming has become.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Colin Sefton, Member for Tunbridge Wells East,
to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council**

In the absence of any meeting of the Devolution and Local Government Reform Cabinet Committee taking place, will the Leader please provide a brief update to the Council on key developments with devolution and local government reorganisation? In particular, can the Leader comment on what steps (if any) have been taken to engage the public and ensure the process is led by the views of the public?

Answer

The County Council last received an update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation at its meeting on 13 March 2025. Since that date, a summary of key developments includes:

- All councils in Kent and Medway submitted an Interim Plan for local government reorganisation on the **21st March**. There have been ongoing meetings of Kent Council Leaders to discuss LGR matters at which KCC has been represented either in a Member or Officer capacity;
- A feedback letter from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government was sent to the Chief Executives of all councils in Kent on **15 May**. This was a pro-forma response sent to all county areas, with the noticeable exception of it raising concerns about the impact of the Kent ports on services such as highways and children's social care, and a request for reorganisation proposals to set out how such impacts could be mitigated through future council structures;
- An Invitation to Tender (ITT) for a Strategic Partner to support development of LGR business cases was issued on **19th May** and closed on the 6th June. KCC is acting as the procurement authority on behalf of all councils in Kent and Medway;
- On **3rd June** the Minister of State awarded Kent and Medway £514,410 as a Proposal Development funding contribution, to support councils to meet the expectation set out in statutory guidance to work collaboratively and proactively on development LGR proposals. This will fund the costs of the above Strategic Partner.
- On the **5th June** I wrote to the Minister requesting a delay in the deadline for LGR business cases to 31 March 2026. He confirmed at the CCN Council on 12 June that he would not agree to the request.

Moreover, since being elected Leader of the Council at the AGM on the 22nd May I have held a series of introductory meetings with the Leaders of Kent's District and Borough Councils on a bilateral basis, including discussing their position on local government reorganisation.

There have been no further developments since the County Council update of 13 March on matters of devolution. Kent and Medway are not part of the Devolution Priority Programme and there have been no further announcements from the Government about

the timeline for the creation of new Mayoral Strategic Authorities outside of the Devolution Priority Programme.

As I stated in my answer to Question 1 from Mr Hood, I remain deeply concerned about the lack of direct public engagement on the matter of local government reorganisation. I am committed to campaigning against the imposition of LGR on Kent and raising public awareness of the risk and challenges it presents. I am further considering what engagement and consultation may be appropriate *after* the 28 November submission deadline, including the possibility of a referendum on the matter.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 10 July 2025

**Question by Tim Prater, Member for Cheriton, Sandgate and Hythe East,
to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council**

Did the Leader learn of any new initiatives or policy ideas at the Local Government Association Conference in Liverpool last week that she may wish to bring to KCC?

Answer

Sadly not.

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