From: Linden Kemkaran - Leader of the Council

To: Scrutiny Committee - 3 August 2026

Subject: The Leader’s Report – *One Year On*

Classification: Unrestricted

Recommendation

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- **NOTE** the progress made during the first year of the Administration across the areas set out in this report.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Over the past year, Kent County Council has continued to respond to significant financial, demographic and infrastructure pressures while maintaining a strong focus on reform, prevention and long-term resilience. This report provides an update on the five key areas requested by the Scrutiny Committee that have shaped the Council’s work and priorities over the last twelve months.

2. Financial Position

2.1 The Council entered 2025–26 facing longstanding significant financial pressures driven by rising demand in adult social care, children’s services and SEND. Despite these challenges, the Council ended the year with an overall revenue overspend of £21.6 million, equivalent to 1.4% of the net revenue budget. This represented a substantial improvement on forecasts earlier in the year, with new robust spending controls, tighter workforce management and DOLGE-led active financial oversight reducing the projected year-end position by almost £14 million from Quarter 3 forecasts.

2.2 During the year, the Council delivered £98.6 million of savings and additional income, demonstrating its ability to adapt and identify efficiencies while protecting frontline services. Although some planned savings remain to be achieved, a significant proportion has been incorporated into future years’ plans.

2.3 The Council continues to maintain an appropriate level of financial resilience. Following the drawdown required to fund the 2025–26 overspend, General Fund reserves remain at £66 million and are forecast to return above the Council’s minimum resilience threshold through planned contributions in future years.

Outlook and Risks

2.4 The financial outlook remains challenging. Demand-led services, particularly adult social care and SEND, continue to place pressure on local government finances nationally and in Kent. The Dedicated Schools Grant deficit remains the most significant long-term financial risk, although recent Government funding announcements linked to SEND reform provide a more positive foundation for future recovery.

2.5 The Council's focus over the coming year will remain on delivering transformation, maintaining financial discipline and ensuring resources are targeted towards residents who need support most.

3. Adult Social Care

3.1 Adult Social Care remains one of the Council's largest and most important services. While demand continues to increase, driven by demographic change and greater complexity of need, the council has made significant progress in transforming the way care is commissioned, managed and delivered. Alongside managing financial pressures, including a £42.9 million overspend in 2025–26, the service has focused on strengthening the provider market, improving value for money and building a more sustainable and resilient care system for the future.

Strengthening Care Contracts and the Provider Market

3.2 One of the most significant achievements over the past year has been the transformation of Kent's approach to commissioning and managing adult social care contracts.

3.3 The Council has redesigned its Adult Social Care commissioning structure, creating clearer accountability, stronger leadership and a more strategic approach to market management. New Commissioning Intentions for 2025–2027 have been introduced, setting out a clear plan to ensure care provision across Kent remains sustainable, high quality and capable of meeting future demand.

3.4 The Council has moved from a largely reactive approach to a more proactive model of market shaping, supported by regular provider engagement forums, stronger partnership working and earlier identification of market risks. More than 100 providers attended the most recent county-wide provider forums, reflecting improved engagement and collaboration between the Council and the care sector.

3.5 Importantly, new contractual arrangements for home care and older people's residential and nursing care and working age residential and community services are being developed. These contracts place greater emphasis on:

- Improved quality assurance and continuous improvement.
- Earlier identification of provider sustainability risks.

- Better integration between commissioning and operational teams.
- Stronger performance monitoring and outcomes measurement.
- Greater involvement of people with lived experience in shaping services.
- Building a resilient, diverse and financially sustainable care market that is capable of meeting future demand.

3.6 The Council has also strengthened provider oversight through enhanced governance arrangements, greater collaboration between commissioning and operational teams, and regular engagement with the Care Quality Commission to support quality improvement across the care market.

3.7 Alongside this, a new Joint Brokerage Team has been established with health partners to support more effective hospital discharge arrangements. This is helping to ensure people receive the right care, at the right time, at the right price by matching people with the most appropriate services, improving hospital discharge and delivery better value for public money.

Improving Quality and Outcomes

3.8 Following the publication of the Care Quality Commission assessment in 2025, Adult Social Care has been implementing a comprehensive improvement plan. Waiting lists for assessments are reducing and going in the right direction, review activity has increased significantly, new support arrangements for carers are being introduced, and improved occupational therapy services have helped more people maintain their independence at home.

3.9 Direct payments have also increased, giving more residents and carers greater choice and control over their support arrangements.

3.10 The Directorate has also made tangible progress against the improvement areas identified by the Care Quality Commission. Care needs assessments awaiting allocation have reduced, review activity has increased, a new carers' support model has been designed and recommissioned, occupational therapy has expanded how it works with other parts of the service, and stronger arrangements are now in place to support prevention, independence and technology-enabled care.

Future Outlook

3.11 Demand pressures across the care sector are expected to continue. However, Kent is responding proactively through strengthened commissioning, improved provider engagement, stronger contractual arrangements and a renewed focus on prevention, independence and long-term sustainability. Together, these improvements provide a stronger foundation for a resilient and high-quality care market across Kent.

4. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

4.1 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities remain one of the most significant challenges facing local government nationally. Kent continues to experience increasing demand for specialist support and placements, which contributed to a Dedicated Schools Grant deficit of £130.5 million at year-end.

4.2 However, the position is improving. Kent's existing recovery arrangements with the Department for Education have now transitioned into wider national SEND reforms, supported by new Government commitments to address historic deficits. The Council is continuing to work closely with the Department for Education to deliver sustainable improvements and strengthen provision across the county.

Inspection and Improvement Progress

4.3 The Council continues to expand specialist provision, improve pathways and strengthen commissioning arrangements to ensure children and young people receive support in the right place and at the right time. The Ofsted/CQC inspection has now taken place and will be reported through the Council's governance when published by the inspectors.

Looking Ahead

4.4 While challenges remain, Kent is making steady progress through reform programmes, increased oversight and stronger partnership working with schools, health services and families. The priority remains improving outcomes for children and young people while maintaining a financially sustainable system.

5. Water – Resilience and Infrastructure

5.1 Water resilience has emerged as one of the most significant strategic issues facing Kent.

5.2 A series of major supply disruptions over the past eighteen months, including significant outages affecting communities in West Kent, highlighted vulnerabilities in existing infrastructure and demonstrated the wider consequences for residents, businesses and public services.

5.3 Although water supply is not a County Council responsibility, KCC has taken a strong leadership and convening role to ensure Kent is better prepared for future challenges.

Progress Over the Past Year

5.4 The Council has:

- Strengthened emergency preparedness and partner coordination through the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum.
- Undertaken water efficiency and demand reduction programmes across schools and the KCC estate.

- Supported water resilience initiatives for agriculture, including water trading platforms and reservoir guidance.
- Secured £200,000 of external funding to develop a county-wide resilience plan.

Long-Term Strategy

5.5 The Council is developing a 25-year Water Resources Strategy to support growth, protect the environment and improve long-term water security. The strategy will focus on:

- Integrated water planning.
- Supporting economic growth and food production.
- Balancing supply and demand.
- Infrastructure investment and innovation.
- Environmental protection.

5.6 A Kent Water Resilience Partnership has also been proposed, bringing together water companies, regulators, councils, businesses and community representatives to coordinate action, improve transparency and strengthen accountability.

5.7 The partnership will support regular performance reporting by water companies on resilience, outages, pollution incidents and sewage discharges, helping to improve transparency and strengthen scrutiny on behalf of Kent residents.

5.8 This represents a significant step towards creating a stronger and more resilient water system capable of supporting Kent's future growth and prosperity.

6. Highways in Kent

6.1 Highways remains one of the services residents interact with most directly and is a key indicator of how effectively local government is delivering for local communities.

6.2 Over the past year, the Administration has prioritised investment in highway maintenance and road renewal through its **Reforming Kent's Roads** programme. This combines rapid pothole repairs with greater investment in preventative maintenance, aimed at improving road condition and reducing the number of future defects.

Record Levels of Highway Repair

6.3 Kent has delivered one of its most intensive road maintenance programmes in recent years.

6.4 During 2025, the Council repaired **53,000 potholes**, which was an increase from 44,939 repairs during the previous year. This demonstrates both the scale of investment and the pace at which repairs have been carried out across the county.

6.5 But more importantly, the Council delivered:

- **250,000 square metres of patching work**, tackling clusters of defects before they deteriorate further. This was up from 192,000 square metres in 2024/25
- More than **1.1 million square metres of highway surface improvements** across Kent which included **preservation treatments**, **and resurfacing.** These are designed to prevent potholes forming and extend the life of road surfaces.
- Of these improvements, **353,356 square metres of resurfacing** was delivered to improve the condition of those heavily used routes that are so important to residents and businesses.

6.6 This represents a significant shift away from simply repairing isolated defects towards a more preventative asset management approach, improving the overall condition of roads while delivering better long-term value for taxpayers.

Investing for the Future

6.7 The Council has also secured a new long-term Highways Term Maintenance Contract with Ringway, which commenced in May 2026. The 21-year contract is expected to support faster repairs, stronger performance management and long-term investment in the county's road network.

6.8 The new contract forms part of a wider transformation programme within Kent Highways and will support innovation, improved customer service, greater accountability and a stronger focus on preventative maintenance.

6.9 While severe winter weather during early 2026 led to a sharp increase in pothole reports across Kent, the Council continued to maintain strong performance, repairing reported defects within national timescales and achieving repair rates above target.

Looking Ahead

6.10 Kent's highway network remains one of the largest in England, serving more than 5,400 miles of road and 4,000 miles of footways. Challenges remain from increasing traffic levels, ageing infrastructure, inflationary pressures and the impacts of more frequent extreme weather.

6.11 However, the combination of record pothole repair activity, increased preventative maintenance, long-term investment and a new maintenance contract provides a strong platform for improving the condition, resilience and reliability of Kent's roads in the years ahead.

6.12 These improvements are increasingly visible to residents and businesses and demonstrate the Council's commitment to delivering safer, smoother and more reliable journeys across the county.

7. Conclusion

7.1 One year on, Kent County Council has demonstrated resilience in the face of considerable challenges. The Council has strengthened its financial position, made significant progress in reforming adult social care commissioning and care contracts, continued to drive improvement across SEND services, taken a leadership role on county-wide water resilience, and delivered substantial investment in Kent's roads and infrastructure.

7.2 Across all five areas there is evidence of tangible progress: stronger financial control, improved care market sustainability, ongoing SEND reform, a long-term strategy for water resilience and a highways programme that has delivered record levels of pothole repairs alongside major investment in preventative maintenance.

7.3 While significant challenges remain—including social care demand, SEND pressures, infrastructure resilience and wider economic uncertainty—the Council enters its second year with a clearer strategic direction, stronger partnerships and a continued focus on delivering positive outcomes for Kent's residents, communities and businesses.

Recommendation

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Appendices

None

Background Documents

Budget Outturn Report - **THE REPORT**

Agenda for County Council on Thursday, 21st May, 2026, 10.00 am - Kent County Council - Council & Democracy