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Report to Parish Councils – November 2026

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in November.

Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have been drawn to the attention of parish councillors and others.

My Activities

In October I did the following (excluding parish councils, briefing meetings and individual meetings with residents).

- Attended a meeting of the Pension Committee. As reported last month, as a result of a government review we have major changes to the pension committee in that we have had to switch from the ACCESS Pool to Borders to Coast. Much of the meeting was taken up with that.
- As an ESCC member of the Dungeness Site Stakeholders group attended a regular update meeting. This gave an update on the decommissioning of the power stations. The site employees many staff, some of East Sussex and has opportunities for apprentices and others.
- I attended the annual award ceremony for the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. Awards are presented to firefighters and other staff, but also sometimes to residents. See below.
- As lead member for IT on the Fire Authority, I attended the quarterly update meeting with our primary IT contractor Telent. IT is crucial to the operation of the fire service, not only as part of the emergency callout process but also for coordination of services such as home inspections.
- We had a full council meeting on 13th October. Key agenda items included:
    - Updates on the budget in the current year and on the start of planning budgeting for next year
    - A motion proposed by a colleague to seek to safeguard the railbed from Uckfield to Lewes. This railway was closed many years ago but there is a plan to reopen it with direct trains to London and elsewhere. This should be a two-line track but

some other developments, including a potential greenway proposed by Wealden District Council would jeopardise this and mean that it could only be a single track which is not viable. I am pleased to say that this motion was passed.

- A motion to set default speed limits in villages to 30mph. There were also amendments proposed which would essentially make this the default speed limit on all rural roads in East Sussex and perhaps move to 20mph speed limits. I am pleased to say that the amendments were defeated, but the default village 30mph motion was passed. Setting such speed limits would still need to follow the Department for Transport guidelines which requires speed surveys and might need road calming measures in some places.
- A motion was proposed by Cllr Field and seconded by me to put pressure on the government to compensate ESCC and the district/borough councils for money wasted on the local government reorganisation. I am pleased to say this was passed unanimously.
- A motion to declare East Sussex a county of harm reduction was proposed. The laudable aim was to help those affected by drug and alcohol addiction. However these activities are already included in work done by councils. It was not clear that this would help or that there was any funds available to carry out the coordination or assessment. It was defeated.
- As vice-chair of planning, I attended a meeting where we considered a retrospective application for an industrial site and a speed limit change on part of the A267.
- I attended a full day meeting held by SouthEast Water on alternative water supplies during outages, i.e. bottled water. See below
- I attended a showing and discussion of the People's Emergency Briefing in Robertsbridge Village Hall

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Update

Every update on this I give in my monthly reports seems to be quickly out of date. On the 29th of October there were meetings with the ministers and statements in the Commons. They key points from this are:

- East Sussex LGR will go ahead with unitary elections in May 2028 to a shadow council with full vesting in April 2029.
- The district and borough elections will therefore go ahead in May 2027.
- The East Sussex unitary footprint will be identical to that for East Sussex county with the exception of Telscombe, Peacehaven and East Saltdean which the government has said will move to Brighton and Hove City Council. However, the government have said they are 'minded to' do this subject to further consultations over the next 3 weeks. Along with all councils in East Sussex we are against this 'annexation' which is against the wishes of residents and will cost millions of pounds. Reform-led ESCC has submitted a Judicial Review to challenge this which has cross-party support.

Brightling Road Surface

Brightling Road in Robertsbridge had a top-dressing treatment applied in July but is now degrading, with areas of loose chippings. I have inspected this myself and have been in frequent contact with highways contactor Balfour Beatty, plus the ESCC head of highways and other senior officials. The current situation (which will be out of date by the time you read this) is:

- Warning signs have been put in place
- An interim solution to stabilise the road will be done – timing not known
- Similarly there will be a permanent solution
- The underlying cause is not clear. It might be faulty technique or the use of different materials. Needless to say, I want to get to the bottom of this.

I have stated that this should not cost residents or the county council additional monies.

SouthEast Water (SEW)

For more than 5 years I have been lobbying SEW to improve the way that bottled water or alternative water is distributed when there are bursts or other outages, for example when there are power cuts. The new CEO, John Halsall seems much more responsive and set up a day in Sussex to look at options for this, attended by staff from councils across Sussex but I was the only county councillor. Some key points from this:

- They have standard bottle stations which are larger sites with HGV access, staffed by SEW. These are typically in larger villages or towns, so often inconvenient for villages in rural areas such as Northern Rother
- A newer concept is of community bottle stations which are staffed by SEW people but possibly supported by volunteers such as parish councillors. I have previously identified sites for these in almost all villages and supplied pictures and assessments of access. Typically these are at village halls and I have had permission from parish councils or village hall trustees for all these sites. Although HGV access is ideal for deliveries, the use of fork lift tricks for pallets is often a good alternative. I am working with SEW to try to identify primary contacts, typically chairs and clerks from parish councils plus suitable training.
- SEW have purchased many more tankers (now 11, previously there were 2). These can be used to pump water directly into the mains in some outages, avoiding the need for bottle stations
- For vulnerable residents there is a Priority Services Register and for those on this who are unable to collect water, it is delivered. I encourage all parish councils to publicise this to ensure that all those in need do get water delivered. SEW also need to update their ‘unable to collect’ data as I know residents who are on the PSR are sometimes delivered water even if they are able to collect. This includes me as I am on the PSR purely due to age!

Separately I have been raising the issue of power cuts causing loss of water. This can be for two reasons:

- Complete loss of power in areas uphill from reservoirs such as Staplecross. In some

cases temporary standby generators have been put in place but apparently these can be stolen. SEW plan to put place permanent ones but the timing of this is not known.

- Power outages, even 'brown-outs' can cause failures at treatment works. SEW say thay are putting place similar battery-backed uninterruptable power supplies, similar to those used in computer data centres, which will avoid this.

As reported previously, I am working with our two district councillors to set up a meeting with residents, probably towards the centre of the division, for example in Staplecross. I am still seeking a date which depends on availability of senior SEW staff.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Award for Local Residents

As a member of the Fire Authority I attended the annual awards ceremony for members of the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. Awards are mostly for firefighters and other staff, but there is also a special category for civilians who have helped in emergency situations. I was surprised and delighted that Robertsbridge residents Anne-Marie Mills and her daughter Elizabeth were given an award for helping to save the life of a man who had fallen into the river near Glottenham. Elizabeth heard a man calling for help, then kept the man's head above water and called her mother, who called emergency services. A very well-deserved award which seems not to have been recognised locally/

Grants for Parishes

No new sources of funding have come up recently so I am not repeating this section, but if you have a project which might benefit from extra funding please contact me and I will endeavour to help.

As one example of this, I have been supporting a parent at Beckley Primary school who is trying to set up a cycle to school scheme but which needs a cycle shed on School Field. I have identified two possible sources of grants which are progressing.