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Report to Parish Councils – July 2025

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

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

I've decided to include a separate section each month with bullet-point summaries of *some* of the meetings I have had, or actions carried out. As elections were originally expected to be held in May the current meeting load is fairly light.

- I attended the meeting of the Pension Board. I am a member of the Pension Committee, but normally also attend the Pension Board, primarily as an observer. The Board particularly represents employers and employees/members/pensioners
- I attended the AGM of the East Sussex Fire Authority where we elected the chair, vice-chair and chairs of the two main panels. I am the Conservative group leader on the Fire Authority though all groups strive to act in a non-political way. I was re-elected chair of the Policy and Resources panel. This month the results of the HMICFRS (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services!) was published with an excellent and very creditable outcome. Some areas still require some improvement, but this is significantly better than 2 years ago.
- I attended, normally remotely, a number of Lead Member meetings. Some notable ones included:
 - Transport and Environment. At one of the meetings of the latter the Transport and Works Act Agreements were approved which were needed as part of the Rother Valley Railway to build level crossings across Junction Road and Northbridge Street. The actual decision is a formality given it was taken by a public enquiry and the minister. I asked that the opportunity be taken to resurface parts of Junction Road.
 - Resources and Climate Change. At one of these the Lead Manager approved asking CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) to

undertake a review of our operations. This is necessary in case, like many other authorities, we need to request exceptional financial assistance from the government. Such assistance can only be provided after a CIPFA review.

- I am one of three councillors on the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel which considers cases where a child, or occasionally young adult, with special needs is not granted free transport to their school. We meet roughly monthly. The substantive meeting papers and minutes are not published as these concern individuals. The June meeting considered 3 cases.
- I attended remotely a briefing on the Hastings Green Connections project which with central government funds is seeking to make the centre of Hastings more attractive to tourists, shoppers whether walking, cycling or driving.
- I attended remotely a meeting of ESCC Cabinet where the focus was on beginning the budget planning for next financial year. We have a process called Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) which is much respected by other local authorities and allows us to try to balance the demands of our services with their finance.
- I am a member of the Pension Committee which has overall responsibility for providing pensions for employees of ESCC and about 130 other employers in local government in East Sussex including the district and borough councils. We met in June. These meetings include standing agenda items such as investment reports (we invest about £5 billion from which pensions are or will be paid) and pension administration. At the moment we are spending much time looking at the implications of the proposed government changes in how pension funds are run. About half of our funds are invested via a pooled structure called ACCESS with 10 other local authorities. The government has taken a decision that ACCESS cannot continue so we are looking at other pools.
- I attended a State of the County briefing by the Chief Executive and senior team, looking at how we provide services to residents and the funding of them. As I often report, local government finance is in a perilous state. We are well run and efficient but revenues from council tax, business rates and central government do not let us provide the services our residents deserve.

Queensway Gateway (QWGW)

This project continues to cause many residents grief. The traffic lights/single line working have been reinstated in reduced length and with peak time manual operation. About 3000 cubic metres of soil is being removed to allow the northbound filter lane to be built. Southern Water will then be working to reposition a water main which was apparently unknown when the work was planned. Opening is expected in the summer and will, I am sure, much improve traffic flows along the A21, the Ridge and towards Bexhill.

In the last few days, I have heard that in July for about 6 weeks, Southern Gas Networks are closing Battle Hill. In my view this is crazy given that QWGW is not yet complete. Battle Hill is used as an alternative route to the Ridge, the Conquest Hospital and Queensway. I am asking that this be postponed until QWGW is open and also that instead of closure, alternative line working is considered.

Newenden Bridge/ Bodiam Bridge

Kent highways are now saying that the most likely period for this closure is in Spring 2026.

I have had discussions with highways and the police about the enforcement of the 18-tonne limit on Bodiam bridge. Apparently, police enforcement would require that they escort offending vehicles to the weighbridge at Johns Cross. I am pushing for camera enforcement which is apparently feasible.

I have made contact with the new Kent County Councillor for the division which includes Newenden. He was unaware of the issue and is investigating.

Grants for Parishes

This section will occur each month and is a list of possible sources of funding for parish level projects. I have had a number of enquiries as to whether any of these could help with areas such as allotments. Sadly the answer is no – these are all intended for community/parish council projects.

- Dungeness Power Stations. I sit on the Site Stakeholder Group which liaises between the massive project to decommission these and the local community. They often provide grants for local activities including some in East Sussex even though the power stations are in Kent. For example, this Christmas Rye food bank is their designated charity.
- Veolia Green and Food Waste Composting Facility. As a member of Place Scrutiny I recently visited this site near Lewes. Their 'output' is compost and they deliver 'one tonne bags' at no cost to local community gardens and similar. I put Peasmarsh parish council in contact with them and they have already received two bags for the community gardens.
- Southeast Water do make grants to local communities, for example to support playgrounds
- Gatwick Airport are keen on funding local projects, at least partly driven by their desire to open a second runway which would have some impact on East Sussex, though less in the Eastern part

If you have a project which might benefit, please let me know and I will put you in contact and try to help get it approved. It seems that the best will be for those seeking funds to send me an email which I will then forward.

Please let me know if you come across any new sources of funding and I will add them to the list.