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Report to Parish Councils – September 2025

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in September and covers the last two months.

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

This section has bullet-point summaries of *some* of the meetings I have had, or actions carried out.

- I am a member of a working group on the Fire Authority looking at the application of CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) rules to the Fire Authority and we met in July. This sounds quite boring and perhaps unimportant, but in local government governance the principles of CIPFA are important and we need to be seen to be compliant., particularly as some of the rules are changing. The same applies to the main County Council.
- I met with the Assistant Director at ESCC responsible for highways to discuss the Battle Hill closure and its interaction with the Queensway Gateway project. See below.
- I attended a full council meeting. The main subject covered was the financial forecasts for coming years and the major challenges we have in funding
- I attended (remotely) an ESCC cabinet meeting
- I attended a briefing to members on road safety and the ESCC approach to this
- I attended a meeting of the Fire Authority Scrutiny and Audit panel as a substitute. I also chaired a meeting of the Fire Authority Policy and Resources Panel. We were particularly looking at the financial outcome for the last financial year, which was much better than expected, and the forecasts for the next three years which look particularly challenging.
- I attended a Fire Authority member's seminar. These are regular meetings to brief members on various aspects of the Fire and Rescue service, typically held remotely.

However, this one was held at the training centre in Maresfield with briefing on several topics and demonstrations including the impact of different concentrations of gas on how fires spread and a demonstration of how a casualty is released from a crashed car. For the latter I volunteered to be the victim, an experience I hope never to have in practice, but reassuring in the skilled and professional way in which the team cut open the car and extracted me!

- I am a member of Place Scrutiny Committee and attended the July meeting. Key topics in the July meeting were budgets for coming years and the performance of Highways against their contract after 2 years. I also proposed that the committee conduct an investigation into how applications for road closures and road works were coordinated and approved, which was accepted.
- I attended an open day at East Sussex Highways in Ringmer looking at new techniques and how they could help us maintain roads and prolong the life of highways, particularly important given the state of our roads and the lack of funding.
- As a member of the Pension Committee, we had a strategy review meeting. The hot topic is the government decision to require increased use of pools. Currently only about 50% of the ~£5 billion in investments we hold to fund pensions is in the ACCESS pool which includes 11 local authorities from the South East. The government also turned down our proposed approach get FCA registration for ACCESS to allow it to continue to hold our investments and that of the other authorities. We are in discussion with other pools about moving to them.
- I attended an update by Homes England on the Hodson's Mill development in Robertsbridge.
- 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. We had two meetings in July,
- I attended a briefing on the forthcoming consultation on the Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan which starts in early September and last 8 weeks. This sets out the plans for the fire service to provide services for the next 3-5 years. I encourage Parish Councils and residents to review and provide feedback on this document. Unlike previous ones there are no substantive changes proposed for at least the first 2 years of the CRMP.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

This continues to move forward, albeit slowly. Key uncertainties are:

- The number and geography of the unitary authorities, particularly in West Sussex and Brighton and Hove, as West Sussex is significantly larger than the guidelines for unitary and Brighton far smaller. Brighton is asking that it be able to expand, perhaps into East Sussex! However East Sussex is the right size to meet government guidelines. The decision is up to the government.
- The mayoral election is due next May. Some candidates have been selected or thrown their hat in the ring.

- County elections were delayed by a year to May 2026 (the maximum delay ministers are allowed to determine) but are expected to be delayed another year, though this needs primary legislation.
- The original government paper stated that costs savings were expected from LGR/Devolution. However later updates from respected third parties suggest that this is not the case, as we have always thought.

Queensway Gateway (QWGW)

The opening of this project has been delayed yet again to September. The primary reason for this was a delay by Southern Water in re-positioning the water supply pipe – in fact I understand they stopped work for two weeks.

However, the contractor has agreed to remove the single line working and traffic lights from 6am to 8pm which will mean the traffic flow should be fine – in fact better than when Junction Road was open. This is particularly important given that Southern Gas are closing Battle Hill for about 6 weeks.

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. We have now spoken and he is chasing the officials responsible in KCC.

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.