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Report to Parish Councils – October 2025

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

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 chaired a meeting of the Long-Term Transport Plan 4 Reference Group, reviewing the way highways projects are prioritised and assessed to bring them in line with the 'People and Places' themes in LTP4
- As IT lead member on the Fire Authority I held a regular catch up with the Assistant Director in the Fire and Rescue Service on various IT issues
- 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.
- I attended a full meeting of the Fire Authority, giving approval for the launch of the Community Risk Management Plan consultation which will cover the next 3 to 5 years of operations. This was followed by a meeting of the Principal Officers Appointments Panel, made of up group leaders, looking at performance and remuneration of the most senior staff in ESFRS.
- I attended multiple briefings and meetings on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. We also had a meeting of the cross-party scrutiny committee reviewing this.
- I attended remotely a meeting of the East Sussex Pension Fund Board. I am not a member of this but am a member of the Pension Committee. The Pension Board represents employers and employees of members of the Pension scheme which

includes about 130 employers.

- I attended a Fire Authority briefing where the main topics were the outcome from the inspection and potential impacts of devolution on the organisation of fire services in Sussex
- I attended a meeting of Full Council where we reviewed the plans to be submitted to government on the 26th September. The meeting voted to support the 'One East Sussex proposal whereby the districts, boroughs and county councils would be replaced by a single unitary council with the same footprint as the current county. See below. This meeting was followed by cabinet and governance meetings.
- I attended a meeting of the Pension Committee. Key topics were a first draft view of the triennial valuation which is crucial to determining the pension contributions from employers and employees. We also discussed the way ahead given the government's decisions on pension fund reorganisation which requires that the ACCESS pool, which we currently use for about half of the investments, be shut down. Some of the papers on both of these were not in public but will become so, though the public papers do summarise the key topics.
- I attended a public meeting in Rother on local government reorganisation and devolution
- I attended a meeting on Place Scrutiny looking specifically at Local Cycling, Wheeling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Speed Limit policy

Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Consultation

As I mentioned verbally last month, the consultation for this has been launched. The CRMP sets out how the FRS proposes to safeguard the residents, businesses and visitors of East Sussex, not only from fires but also from road traffic accidents and similar emergencies. This can be seen at <https://www.esfrs.org/savinglives>

I encourage residents and councillors to review this and provide feedback. The key points I would highlight:

- ESFRS has significant financial challenges in the medium term
- In the short term (next 1-2) years we should be able to achieve a balanced budget though with some use of our limited reserves
- The CRMP has no significant changes in service, in the provision of appliances, fire stations etc for at least the next two years

The situation after the next two years depends particularly on government funding and policy for Fire and Rescue Services. We continue to strive to find economies and efficiencies.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

As can be seen from the meetings I have attended, this is a hot topic at the moment. The key development this month was the submission of the proposal for East Sussex to the government on 26th September.

This can be seen at <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/your-council/about/devolution-sussex/one-east-sussex>

The plan, called One East Sussex, proposes that a single East Sussex Unitary Authority is set up on the same overall footprint as East Sussex County Council. The County, District and Boroughs would still all be abolished but this minimises the disruption to help ensure that services continue to be provided to residents.

This plan was produced jointly, based on consultations with all five district and borough councils, run by a range of parties, though one (Wealden) pulled out at the last minute. Nevertheless, this proposal is understood to have more consensus than those in other parts of the country.

The other two authorities proposed the following:

- At the last minute Brighton and Hove proposed a **five** unitary council solution with some boundary changes, roughly two in East Sussex, two in West Sussex and one in an expanded Brighton, the latter expanding Eastwards into areas such as Seaford.
- West Sussex proposed that West Sussex form a single unitary.

The huge challenge with the Brighton proposal is that crucial services such as Adult and Social Care, Children's Services etc would need to be split into separate departments for each unitary, costing much more and reducing efficiency. These proposals are also against the government guidance which required existing boundaries to be respected, unitary authorities to have more than 500,000 residents and that proper consultation occurs. A consultation within East Sussex indicated a massive majority in areas such as Seaford against joining Brighton.

The final decision is up to the government which should be known within 12 weeks, though hopefully sooner.

Queensway Gateway (QWGW)

I write this on the 30th September and am delighted to say that this is now open. I drove down it this morning. There are a few tasks still needed which might need a few nighttime closures, but we expect it to make major improvements to traffic flow, both along the ridge, down the A21 into Hastings and for those travelling to Bexhill. The traffic lights are intelligent and are understood to automatically learn and adapt to traffic flows which may take a little time.

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.