



Cllr Paul Redstone  
Email: [Cllr.Paul.Redstone@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.Paul.Redstone@eastsussex.gov.uk)  
Phone: 07510 074267

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## Report to Parish Councils – December 2025

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

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.

- On Remembrance Sunday I attended St Giles in Bodiam and laid a wreath. I attend a different parish each year for this and have now attended 5 in all. Always very moving.
- As Leam Member for Information Technology on the Fire Authority I met with the Associate Director of the Fire and Rescue Service responsible for IT. IT is crucial to many of the operations of the ESFRS
- I chaired a meeting of the Local Transport Plan Reference group to get an update and give feedback on the Local Cycle, Walking and Wheeling Infrastructure Plan which deals with cycle lanes/paths and similar
- Deputising for the Chair of the Pension Committee, I addressed the annual Employer's Forum to which all employers in the East Sussex Pension Scheme are invited. (There are more than 150, some large councils, others much smaller from companies or organisations which have been outsourced).
- I chaired a meeting of the Policy and Resources Panel of the Fire Authority looking particularly at financial performance in the year to date and projections
- As one of three councillors on the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel, we met to 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 went to Robertsbridge Community College to give mock interviews to students in their last year, as I have done for several years. Not a political meeting but always a delight.

I also took the opportunity to meet the new head teacher who is leading the turnaround of the school from a previous poor Ofsted inspection.

- I attended a meeting of the Pension Committee. High on the agenda was the government-imposed change to the investment pooling structure which is consuming much of our time and that of officials
- I attended a remote members' briefing on transport for SEND pupils
- I attended a remote seminar for members of the Fire Authority
- As a member of the cross-party Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Scrutiny Reference Group I took part in a remote meeting. This meeting concentrated on the likely powers of the mayor and associated organisation, largely presented by an excellent and authoritative consultant who has experience in several other mayoral authorities. The fees for the consultant are coming out of the central government funding to councils in the Devolution Priority Programme. We all felt that this was well worthwhile and will help to ensure a workable and accountable mayoral combined county authority
- I attended a meeting of Place Scrutiny where the principal items were budget for the next three years, an update on electric vehicle chargers, a call-in regarding the proposed relocation of the Hastings registry office and a notice of motion (which would go to cabinet then full council) to require speed limits of 20 mph on all new housing developments
- I attended a Place Scrutiny panel on Streetworks (permits for works on the highways and associated traffic lights, diversions and closures). I proposed this panel due to some frustration with the coordination of road works. Most of the meeting was an in-depth presentation and questions with the head of network management in ESCC highways. We have several more meetings then will produce a report which will hopefully lead to improvements.
- I attended a meeting and focus group run by Homes England to look at the Mill development site in Robertsbridge.
- I attended a remote briefing on the use of AI for council work. I am an IT expert but not expert in AI and was very impressed by the capabilities of Microsoft Co-Pilot which is part of our overall Microsoft licence and which, used with care, can offer real advantages in analysing official papers and other sources, responding to questions from residents and similar.

### **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation**

As a reminder there are two linked parts to this: the Mayoral Combined County Authority covering all of Sussex and the move to unitary authorities with the abolition of the district, borough and county councils (LGR)

On the first of these, the government is close to publishing the Statutory Instrument leading to the Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority. In the meantime the interim chief executive of the CCA has been appointed and various groups, committees and consultants are working hard to flesh out the details of the Governance and Assurance frameworks, funded by special government grants. The aim is to have something which is

workable and accountable.

On LGR the government has decided that, due to their being several proposals, it wants a public consultation and this can be accessed and replies submitted at [Proposals for local government reorganisation in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, and West Sussex - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-east-sussex-and-brighton-and-hove-and-west-sussex-gov.uk)

(or full address)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-east-sussex-and-brighton-and-hove-and-west-sussex/proposals-for-local-government-reorganisation-in-east-sussex-and-brighton-and-hove-and-west-sussex>

The county council together with 4 of the 5 districts and boroughs (Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes and Rother) proposed a single unitary covering East Sussex called 'One East Sussex'. Wealden district council did not recommend any option.

Brighton and Hove proposed a radical change to 5 unitaries across East and West Sussex

The consultation also covers West Sussex but I do not list the options here.

In my mind and those of almost all councils, controlled by a range of parties, we strongly recommend the 'One East Sussex' proposal which follows current geography, is in line with the government white paper and does not require expensive reorganisations of key services.

The consultation closes on 11<sup>th</sup> January and we expect to hear the government decision within about a month. **I strongly encourage parish councils and individuals to respond to this.**

### **Newenden Bridge/ Bodiam Bridge**

No more news on yet. I expect to hear more as Spring approaches.

### **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. The criteria for this used to be with 15 miles of Dungeness but this has been increased to 20 miles.

Apparently the budget for this is underspent this year, so I encourage clerks to identify specific items they apply for a grant. Apparently values less than £2000 are readily approved. Contact me for details.

- Veolia Green and Food Waste Composting Facility. As a member of Place Scrutiny I have 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.