

## **District Councillor (KCC) Report for November 2021 (Cllr S Chandler):**

The entire Kent County Council family were devastated recently by the sudden death of our Chairman Ann Allen, not only was Ann the Council Chairman she had for many years chaired the Corporate Parenting Panel and been a Champion for both the children we care for and young people in general. As someone said to me last week 'she didn't just talk the talk she walked the walk'. We will miss her common sense, integrity, and her absolute commitment to our children.

Food vouchers were provided for Kent families whose children are entitled to benefits-related Free School Meals this October half-term, a £15 food voucher for each eligible child was provided through schools, which could be used in supermarkets and local shops.

KCC will fund the vouchers using part of its allocation from the Government's Household Support Fund, which was launched in September to help local authorities support some of their most vulnerable households during the winter. The vouchers are the first scheme KCC has announced it will be funding from its £11.06m allocation and details of further proposed spending will be announced in due course. Cabinet considered a paper which included details of the Helping Hands scheme last week, this scheme, in partnership with Districts, will continue.

The results of the Kent Test were sent out on 21st October. Secondary school applications for Kent residents closed on Monday, November 1. Receiving a selective assessment in the Kent Test does not guarantee a child a place at a Kent grammar school, it means they can be considered for any Kent grammar school their parent names on the Secondary Common Application Form (SCAF) on National Offer Day (Tuesday, March 1, 2022). Places will be offered in line with each school's admissions criteria, which can be found at [www.kent.gov.uk/secondaryadmissions](http://www.kent.gov.uk/secondaryadmissions). Families were advised to make use of all four options on their SCAF as selecting fewer schools does not increase their chances of gaining a place at a preferred school. The Cabinet Member for Education pointed out last week that those parents whose children were not assessed as being suitable for selective schools should not worry as Kent has good all ability schools, as in our area we are fortunate to have Sandwich Technology School which is an all ability Academy rated good by Ofsted as well as Sir Roger Manwood's as well as access from some of the Division to schools in Dover and Canterbury.

The council's commissioned digital care programme project 'Kara' has won national recognition at the HTN HealthTech Awards (7 October), winning the Major Project Go Live category.

Healthcare transformation consultancy Rethink Partners and pioneers of virtual care Alcove delivered the £1.5million project on behalf of the council last year. By the end of July 2020, they had successfully equipped over 1,700 vulnerable and digitally disadvantaged adults in Kent with video 'carephones', so that they could talk to friends, family, carers, and other professionals, via video, when they were unable to meet due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The technology, in the form of a "one touch" secure tablet-type device, provided video-calling to an individual's support network, which allowed KCC support staff to monitor care needs, ensure that residents were safe, and enabled residents to conduct online activities such as ordering essential supplies and stay video connected with their loved ones.

The team also trained health and care professionals, including those working in care homes and in the community, so they were able to support vulnerable people to use the technology.

Living in our area close to Sandwich and Canterbury we are very aware of the history around us, including the large number of historic buildings that we are fortunate to have, in our towns and villages, including the most complete medieval street in the country! Now an eight-week consultation on KCC's latest plans for protecting the county's heritage is under way with residents and businesses encouraged to make their views known.

The draft Strategy outlines how KCC intends to protect its heritage assets, while tackling a number of challenges, including climate change, coastal erosion, rural activities, housing developments, and infrastructure requirements such as sewers, water supplies and roads.

Another challenge is finding a solution to the issue of archiving artefacts discovered during excavations. KCC is already the owner of more than 2,500 boxes of archive material deriving primarily from the Channel Tunnel Rail Link project and has a direct responsibility to find a home for them.

KCC is also responsible for the long-term storage of archives from road schemes and other county council developments and is keen to continue working with partners to develop a solution for all Kent's archives, as the retention and deposition of archaeological archives is regarded as national good practice. As the main archaeological curator for Kent, KCC has a responsibility to help find a solution to the archives problem and improve access to information.

The tourism industry is an important sector providing 67,000 jobs and contributing more than £1.4 billion to the Kent economy. It is estimated that nearly a third of the annual spend from domestic and international tourism in the UK is attributable to activities broadly defined as heritage-related. Locally we are also aware of the benefits that tourism can bring to our economy, but also of the difficulties of preserving and maintaining that heritage. Do please contribute to this consultation.

The draft Heritage Conservation Strategy can be found here: [www.kent.gov.uk/heritageconservationstrategy](http://www.kent.gov.uk/heritageconservationstrategy). Feedback can be provided via the online questionnaire before 13 December 2021.

Since its COVID Business Helpline was set up at the start of the pandemic, [the Kent and Medway Growth Hub](#) (KMGH) has helped thousands of companies adjust to changing times.

A one-stop-shop for business advice, the [South East Local Enterprise Partnership](#) (SELEP)-funded Hub helps new and existing firms find the most suitable support available in their area – from accessing funding to connecting with other like-minded enterprises.

Since March 2020 the KMGH COVID line, backed by Kent County Council (KCC) and a number of districts, has received over 18,000 calls for advice – including guidance on grant applications, furlough arrangements and home working. More than 5,300 businesses have also been assisted by webchats, with a further 8,785 receiving individual one-to-one advice sessions.

Now the Kent & Medway Growth Hub is focused on supporting businesses as the UK economy continues its COVID recovery and adaption to Brexit, I would like to remind local companies that support, including 36 hours of one-to-one free mentoring through the Hub's KCC-funded enhanced Business Support Programme, is just a phone call away – on 03333 602 300.

We are very fortunate in having access to some fantastic parks and open spaces in and around Sandwich, and in the past 18 months we have seen the value of them to our health and well-being more than ever. Now Pegwell Bay Country Park is one of the eight of KCC's Country parks – one more than previously – to have been recognised with the prestigious Green Flag Award.

The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for their management across the United Kingdom and around the world, definitely something to celebrate and be proud of.