



AYLESHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **Annual Parish Council Meeting** held on
Tuesday 23rd May 2023 at 19.00pm, Aylesham House.

SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION AT THE NEXT MEETING

1. Those Present

Cllrs J. Pout (Chair), K. Sutcliffe (Vice Chair), G. Armstrong, S. Bott, D. Garrity, D. Fleck, D. Miller, B. Oliver, L. Prescott.

Parish Clerk K. Robinson, Acting Assistant Clerk N. Purcell.

Two members of the public.

2. Apologies for Absence

County Cllr S. Manion.

3. Election of Chair for the Council year 2023-2024

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott, seconded by G. Armstrong that J. Pout be nominated as Chair.

Outcome: 8 in favour, 1 abstain. Motion carried.

J. Pout was duly elected as Chair of Aylesham Parish Council for the Council year 2023-2024.

4. Signing of Acceptance of Office – Chair

J. Pout signed the Acceptance of Office which was witnessed by the Parish Clerk.

5. Election of Vice-Chair for the Council year 2023-2024

Resolved: It was proposed by B. Oliver and seconded by D. Miller that K. Sutcliffe be nominated as Vice Chair.

Outcome: 8 votes in favour, 1 abstain, motion carried.

K. Sutcliffe was duly elected as Vice Chair of Aylesham Parish Council for the Council year 2023-2024.

6. Signing of Acceptance of Office – Vice-Chair

K. Sutcliffe signed the Acceptance of Office which was witnessed by the Parish Clerk.

7. Election of members to Committees for the Council year 2023-2024

- **Finance, Audit & Personnel**

K. Sutcliffe; S. Bott; B. Oliver; D. Garrity nominated themselves.

Resolved: It was proposed by D. Fleck and seconded by G. Armstrong that the nominees are elected onto the Finance, Audit and Personnel Committee for the Council year 2023-24.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

- **Planning, Environment & Transport**

S. Bott; D. Fleck; G. Armstrong and D. Miller nominated themselves.

Resolved: It was proposed by D. Garrity and seconded by K. Sutcliffe that the nominees are elected to the Planning Environment and Transport Committee for the Council year 2023-2024.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

- **Recreational & Facilities**

D. Garrity, G. Armstrong, B. Oliver, K. Sutcliffe, and L. Prescott nominated themselves for the Recreational and Facilities Committee.

Resolved: It was proposed by D. Miller and seconded by D. Fleck that the nominees are elected to the Recreation and Facilities Committee for the council year 2023-2024.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

8. Election of Committee Chair for 2023-2024

8.1 Finance, Audit & Personnel

Resolved: It was proposed by K. Sutcliffe and seconded by B. Oliver that S. Bott be elected as Chair of the Finance, Audit & Personnel Committee for the Council year 2023-2024.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

8.2 Planning, Environment & Transport

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by K. Sutcliffe that D. Fleck be elected as Chair of the Planning, Environment and Transport Committee for the Council year 2023-2024.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

8.3 Recreational & Facilities

Resolved: It was proposed by G. Armstrong that D. Garrity be elected as Chair of the Recreational and facilities committee. No seconder.

Outcome: Proposal does not stand.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by B. Oliver that K. Sutcliffe be Chair of the Recreational & Facilities Committee.

Outcome: 8 votes in favour, 1 abstain. Motion carried.

9. Policy Reviews and Adoption for 2023-2024

All policies have previously been adopted by Council: amendments have been made to:

- Expenses Policy to reflect updated hotel costs.
- Councillor Email and Communications Policy.

The CCTV Policy is a brand-new policy, as per the requirements of the Information Commissioners Office.

All policies have been presented upon Acceptance of Office to Aylesham Parish Council in their Councillor packs.

The Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, Financial Regs, S101 Delegation of Powers, Terms of Reference for the three Committees: Planning, Environment & Transport, Finance, Audit & Personnel and Recreational & Facilities have also been presented to be re-agreed for 2023/2024.

Resolved: It was proposed by D. Fleck and seconded by B. Oliver that the following amendments be made to the S101 Scheme of Delegation

1. should read: "To take action with the response of at least three councillors, to include the chair or vice chair."
2. Amend the typo of the word "food".

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

Resolved: It was proposed by D. Fleck and seconded by G. Armstrong to adopt and accept all policies and documents as detailed above.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

10. Appointing Representatives to offer support to external groups (if they are in agreement) for the Council year 2023-2024

If external groups are in agreement, the Parish Council can offer representatives to external community groups and organisations. Councillors cannot be appointed as trustees/members of organisations with voting rights; instead, they attend meetings and be present to be asked any questions by the organisation and vice versa. Councillors acting as representatives will need to give reports each month to Council and know that they cannot make decisions on behalf of Aylesham Parish Council as all decisions must be made by Full Council.

Resolved: It was proposed by K. Sutcliffe and seconded by G. Armstrong that the Parish Council offer representatives to external organisations and community groups.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by G. Armstrong that this is promoted to the community groups.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

11. To receive the Calendar of Meetings for the Council year 2023-2024 (Full Council & Committees)

Council have been presented with a calendar of meetings for both Full Council and Committees for the Council year 2023/2024.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by D. Fleck that the calendar is also digitally sent to Councillors.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

12. The Chair's opening remarks.

J. Pout thanked everyone for coming, he congratulated all Councillors on their recent election; that he looks forward to working with them during the four-year term.

13. Declarations of Cllr interests and changes to the Register of Interest

S. Bott- Chair of Aylesham & District Community Workshop Trust

D. Garrity- Aylesham & Snowdown Social Welfare Scheme. Chair of Aylesham and Snowdown Club.

14. To confirm the Minutes of Previous meeting held on 11th April 2023

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by B. Oliver that the minutes from the meeting held on 11th April 2023 are a true and accurate record.

Outcome: 7 in favour, 2 abstain. Motion carried.

15. To report any Matters Arising (*from the previous minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda*)

None.

Meeting was suspended for up to 15 minutes to allow discussion with members of the electorate of the Parish of Aylesham present at the meeting.

16. Public Representation (Notified to Clerk in advance of the meeting, agenda items only)

See Appendix A (page 12)

Resident left the meeting after this item, one resident remained.

17. External Reports

17.1 County Councillor Report

Report received from Cllr S. Manion – See Appendix B (page 12)

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by K. Sutcliffe, to contact Cllr S. Manion to request that his reports received by Aylesham Parish Council are specific to Aylesham issues.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

17.2 District Councillor Reports

No apologies received; Cllr Mamjan had been in contact with the Parish Clerk but had a prior meeting so advised she may be running late.

17.3 Dover District Council Community Development Officer

N. Chester will be attending the June Parish Council meeting, no report received.

Parish Council Meeting Resumed

18. Parish Clerk Report

18.1 Email received from resident reporting overgrown vegetation in the PROW EE291 along Cornwallis Avenue.

Actioned: Reported to Kent County Council to action.

18.2 Email received from resident highlighting that the parking problems on Dorman Avenue South outside the Baptist Church are still of concern.

Actioned: Resident advised to continue to report the issues to Dover District Council parking enforcement with dates and times; once reported to Dover District Council Aylesham Parish Council could escalate this to District Councillors.

18.3 Dover Police Community Safety Unit Team invite to the quarterly 'Dover Police – District Town and Parish Council Meeting' at 18.00pm on Tuesday 23rd May 2023. The meeting is to be hosted by Inspector Barrell of the Dover Community Safety Unit and will cover aspects of the new Neighbourhood Policing model, as well as other matters that are relevant to the communities they serve. These quarterly meetings are intended to provide engagement opportunities with our local Police service in the interim period before the new Kent Police Neighbourhood Policing model is embedded and ensures Kent Police's commitment to listen and engage with local representatives.

Actioned: Apologies were sent, and enquiries made about arrangements for a replacement PCSO. PCSO McGuinness is covering the Ward until 7th June 2023, then PC Benstead will oversee the Parish. The Parish Clerk has asked for further information on this.

19. Section 101 Delegated Authority (*items to be noted by Council*)

19.1 Dover District Council Planning Application Reference 23/00490

Proposal: Conversion of part stable outbuilding to form study/studio accommodation. Works include Insertion of 1no door and window to front elevation. Insertion of 2no windows to rear elevation. Insert burner flue to North side elevation. Internal works include dry lining, inserting suspended floor, wall and ceiling upgrades. Insert partitions to form separate utility/washroom.

Location: Ratling Court, Ratling Road, Aylesham

Outcome: Four Councillors responded, three in favour of 'no comment'; one objection. A Consultee response of 'no comments' has been submitted to Dover District Council.

20. Finance, Audit & Personnel

20.1 To approve May 2023 payments:

Payee	Expenditure	Invoice Number	Net	VAT	Total
Staff Expenses – Parish Clerk	Zoom subscription – May	N/A	£15.39	N/A	£15.39
Payments previously made in May (as per Financial Regulations 5.2)					
Envisage Grounds Maintenance Ltd	Grounds Maintenance April 2023	1324	£778.00	£155.60	£933.60
Staff Expenses – Caretaker	Park Inspections Mileage April (4 weeks) 4.3 miles per week at 0.45p per mile	N/A	£7.74	N/A	£7.74
Print Matters Ltd	Printing 2,054 pages Cllr & Officer Packs	13561	£78.00	N/A	£78.00
Ovenden Allworks Ltd	Installation of Noticeboard	2944	£250	£50	£300
Noticeboard Company (UK) Ltd	Noticeboard	20544	£1,043.00	£208.60	£1,251.60
Christopher Cooney	Window Cleaning	174	£35	N/A	£35
Rialtas Business Solutions Ltd	Annual invoice for accounting software, plus support & maintenance	SM28011	£131.99	£26.40	£158.39
Rialtas Business Solutions Ltd	Year End 22/23 Accounts Closedown	30490	£755.00	£151.00	£906.00
Safeplay Playground Services Ltd	Quarterly (April) Independent Playground Inspections	23703	£10.00	£2.00	£12.00

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by K. Sutcliffe that the May 2023 payment schedule be accepted.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

20.2 To consider and approve the Kent Association of Local Councils Annual Subscription 2023/2024

The total cost for subscription for the Council year 2023-2024 is £1,381.25 plus VAT.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by K. Sutcliffe that the Parish Council pay the subscription invoice of £1,381.25 plus VAT for KALC.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

20.3 Staff Matters - Confidential to be held under the Public Bodies (admission to meetings) Act 1960

Resolved: It was proposed by K. Sutcliffe and seconded by B. Oliver that this item is deferred to the June Full council meeting.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

20.4 Zoom Subscription

Requests to attend meetings virtually from the public are now non-existent, therefore the Parish Clerk recommended to Council that the subscription is cancelled, saving £15.39 per month. The May invoice has been paid, but if agreed will be cancelled thereafter. If the need arises for virtual attendance, the Parish Council have access to Microsoft Teams.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by G. Armstrong to cancel the Zoom subscription.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

21. Recreational & Facilities

21.1 Land Hire Agreement – Aylesham 4 Aylesham Application July 2023 (second discussion)

All Documents have now been received. Permission is also required for use of electricity provided by Aylesham Parish Council, and vehicles on the Square on the day of the event. Aylesham4Aylesham will need to supply the mechanical rides information as per Condition of Hire 25, and a copy of their Public Liability Insurance once renewed prior to the start of the hire period.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by K. Sutcliffe that permission is granted, including permission for vehicles on the Square, and the use of electricity for the event.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

22.2 Play Parks & Market Square – Any new matters/updates

Weekly inspections are carried out by the Caretaker as part of her job role. The quarterly independent inspections of play areas have recently taken place in April. Repair quotes are awaiting the Recreational Committee to discuss at their first meeting.

The Skate Park: Two skate ramps have large chips in them which need to be replaced, and the graffiti is due to be removed.

Attlee Avenue also known as Cripps Close Play Area: Off road motorbikes and quad bikes have been seen riding around the park over the last few weekends. There is currently no damage to the ground, however if weather changes there will be. There are concerns that

this may carry on as they have been witnessed accessing the park from properties that were recently given access gates by Dover District Council Housing. Dover District Council have been informed about this. CCTV pole and camera are installed but have not yet been connected by UKPN – this has been chased. Residents are advised to report any ASB issues to Aylesham Parish Council, Dover District Council and Kent Police.

22. Planning

22.1 Kent County Council Public Right of Way Consultation request

Proposal: Proposed Diversion of part of Public Footpath EE291 and EE291A at

Location: Aylesham (postcode: CT3 3AX)

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by D. Fleck that the Parish Council OBJECT to this proposal, as it does not meet the planning objections previously submitted by the parish council, and the shared space is not sufficient.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

22.2 Kent County Council Public Right of Way Consultation request

Proposal: Proposed Diversion of part of Public Footpath EE288 and EE461

Location: Aylesham ref: 0130 (postcode: CT3 3HH)

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by D. Fleck that the Parish Council STRONGLY OBJECT to this proposal, as it does not address the previous planning objections with reference to the path and woodland.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

22.3 Kent County Council Public Right of Way Consultation request

Proposal: Proposed diversion of Public Footpath EE461 (part)

Location: Aylesham (Postcode: CT3 3GT)

Resolved: It was proposed by D. Fleck and seconded by B. Oliver that the planning application has been noted, and the Council note that it is retrospective.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

22.4 Dover District Council Planning Reference 23/00492

Proposal: Erection of two storey rear extension (conservatory to be demolished)

Location: 59 Milner Crescent, Aylesham CT3 3BJ

B. Oliver declared an interest in the above planning application and left the room at 20:23

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott and seconded by D. Fleck that Aylesham Parish Council submit 'NO COMMENT' to this application.

Outcome: 8 in favour, motion carried.

B. Oliver returned to the meeting at 20:26

23. Aylesham Development & Aylesham Development Update Meetings

23.1 To discuss and note the Dover District Council Meeting Notes of 18th April 2023

Meeting notes have just been received from Dover District Council which will be sent to Councillors. Parish Clerk has noticed some discrepancies which will be raised with Dover District Council.

23.2 To receive any update on the Demand Responsive Bus Service

No updates.

23.3 To receive any updates on the Market Square Lighting Project

All materials are due imminently; they have taken longer as they are made to order. Parish Clerk will be contacted further once the works have been programmed.

23.4 To discuss any new or existing issues

Existing Issues

Update regarding the Heras fencing on Freddie's Field and Station Field: The email agreed to be sent to Dover District Council at our April meeting was sent, however no response was received until the Parish Clerk noted it was disappointing to not have received a reply. An apology was received as they thought they had replied and commented the following:

- The fencing requirement is different for construction works than they are for archaeological works.
- They can confirm the fencing for the construction sites on Station Field and Freddie's Field will be as per the Colliers Way site.
- Construction sites on Station Field and Freddie's Field will have out of hours security guards and PIR sensitive lighting on all elevations.
- Damaged Heras fencing was reported to Kent Police by the developers. Dover District Council are unable to confirm whether there is CCTV of the incidents as only Kent Police are able to access it as part of their investigations.

New Issues

One Heras fence was found in the Skate Park play area. This was reported to Dover District Council who assured the Parish Clerk that the developers will remove it. However as of yesterday (22nd May), the fence panel along with the bases for Heras fencing are still there.

Resolved: It was proposed by S. Bott, seconded by B. Oliver that the matter is escalated within Dover District Council - all items need to be urgently removed, especially with half term fast approaching.

Outcome: 7 in favour, 2 abstained. Motion carried.

A dog waste bin on Colliers Way has been fenced into the development site. Dover District Council have asked Aylesham Parish Council where they would like it relocated to so that residents can still access it.

Resolved: It was proposed by B. Oliver that the dog waste bin is located next to the existing litter bin at the bus stop on Hill Crescent.

Outcome: No seconder- proposal does not stand.

Resolved: It was proposed by K. Sutcliffe and seconded by D. Miller that the dog waste bin is moved further down Boulevard Courrieres on the same side of the road; next to the bus stop by Hawthorn Close.

Outcome: All in favour, motion carried.

Parking problems on Boulevard Courrieres from the development site: workmen are double parking on the bend into Hill Crescent and taking up spaces in lay-bys that residents use. Parish Clerk has reported this to the appropriate Officer at Dover District Council who has replied:

"The developers are now parking on the closed off Colliers Way and will soon be having additional parking in the industrial yard behind the site. My contact at BDW Homes will notify site management about the complaint and they will monitor / enforce sensible parking where appropriate."

24. Aylesham House (any updates)

24.1 To receive any updates on the Planning Application

Planning permission for Aylesham House has been approved. The next stage is building regulations which provide working drawings that give builders the details to construct the extension and enables Aylesham Parish Council to obtain tender prices.

25. Highways Improvement (any updates)

25.1 To receive any updates on the proposed Zebra Crossing on Dorman Avenue North

Kent County Council have carried out a Non-Motorised Users Survey and have informed the Parish Council that the results do not meet the guidelines to have a zebra crossing installed, despite the Parish Council having the full funding for the project. The Clerks' pushed for this to be investigated further. A meeting then took place with Kent County Council today (23rd May). Even though Kent County Council had an internal meeting about this they are still not allowing a zebra crossing, or any crossing to be installed.

The Clerks' need to look in depth at the data and information received and, in the meantime, have asked Kent County Council today for their decision and reasoning in writing. Parish Clerk advised Council to discuss this once all information has been received and investigated.

26. Spinney Wood

26.1 To receive any updates from White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

No updates received from White Cliffs Countryside Partnership.

D. Fleck advised that there is a volunteer day on Monday 29th May 2023 from 10am-1pm, the meeting place is at the Cooting Road entrance.

27. Aylesham & District Community Workshop Trust

27.1 To receive any updates on the meeting to be held with A&DCWT & APC Officers

The planned meeting was postponed due to illness – apologies from A&DCWT were received for this. Parish Clerk has proposed new dates of 5th and 7th June and she is now awaiting confirmation from E. Barnes.

28. Next Meeting Date

Tuesday 13th June 2023.

29. Items for next Agenda

- Discussion regarding the Parish Council's objectives for the next 4 years.
- To look at the possibility of joint resident surgeries with the Community Development Officer and Parish Councillors at Bechange Community Hub.

-Meeting Closed at 20:54-

It has been agreed by council that these minutes are a true and accurate record.

Signed (Chair).....

Date.....

Aylesham Parish Council meeting June 2023

Appendix A: Public Representation (Notified to Clerk in advance of the meeting, agenda items only)

Resident attended and spoke regarding item 14: Aylesham Development.

Resident expressed the following concerns:

- Signage at the entrance to Collier's Way must have cost somewhere into thousands of pounds and there have been unnecessary amounts of changes to the road junction which have added to the expenditure on the area.
- Concerns about the junction at Cooting Road/B2046 Adisham Road: when buses turn out of the junction it is too narrow, so they have to swing on the other side of the road toward oncoming traffic to make the turn.
- A desire for the Parish, District and County Councils to address some of the issues, such as the need for a Zebra crossing and speed restrictions.

J. Pout thanked the resident for attending and speaking and then responded with the following points:

- Kent County Council maintain the highways, and make the decisions on the road signage changes, and the costs of this, not the Parish Council.
- The Parish Council have submitted an extensive Highways Improvement Plan which includes speed reduction measures and the installation of a Zebra Crossing in the village.

Appendix B: KCC Cllr S. Manion Report

Budget

Now our big challenge will be to deliver the budget, while the process of building the 2024-25 budget starts now.

Financial monitoring at the nine month (end of December) stage of this financial year, reported to a recent Cabinet meeting shows a projected 2022-23 overspend of £53.7m. This is gradually coming down, and part of it will be met by the £25m we set aside as a risk reserve at the start of the financial year. Nonetheless, it seems almost inevitable that we will, for the first time in more than twenty years, see a significant overspend at the close of the financial year, which will have to be met from our reserves.

The biggest factors in the overspend were: cost pressures in adult social care, notably older people's residential services; growth and increasing costs in school transport, in particular for SEND students; and sharply higher placement costs, reflecting the challenges in foster care recruitment and higher costs for more specialist placements, in children's services. In addition, we expect that nearly £15m of savings (net of over delivery in some areas) projected for the year have not been achieved, the bulk of them to be taken forward into the new financial year. On the capital side, we are seeing the impact of severe inflationary pressures.

Shortly before the Autumn Statement, the Leaders of Hampshire and Kent wrote a well-publicised letter to senior ministers setting out our concerns about the unsustainable financial position confronting councils such as ours. They have recently held a very useful meeting with Lee Rowley, a member of the DLUHC ministerial team, to investigate further the issues raised in our letter and look forward to these discussions continuing.

Help for residents

Back at the October County Council, there was a very high-quality debate on the cost-of-living crisis and our response to it, and that was followed by work with our District colleagues and our NHS partners to seek to coordinate the response.

We have a strong record in supporting our residents through the crises and pressures of recent years, which began with a commitment, ahead of much of the sector, to delivery of Free School Meals in the half term in October 2020. Since that time, government has brought forward a series of programmes, running from September 2021 as the Household Support Fund. In the first two rounds of funding, over 450,000 awards have been issued to Kent residents. This has covered areas such as food vouchers for Free School Meal eligible families, energy vouchers, support with water bills, funding passed to District and Borough Councils and more. The third round of the Fund is currently being delivered, while a £22 million fourth round (announced recently) runs for a full year to March 2024.

Alongside this, we have run our own Financial Hardship Programme, which includes and has built on the Helping Hands Scheme, launched in February 2021 with £10 million from the Covid Emergency Grant. The innovative schemes have included the Money Advice Hub strengthening of Referrals and Data Sharing between councils. Much of the focus is on ensuring that services and support are available to the residents already entitled to them, and that we help residents build their financial resilience.

NHS and social care

42 Integrated Care Systems (ICS), aimed at joining up health and care, came into being on 1 July last year. Kent and Medway is an ICS; it is a significant positive that we are not, as some other counties are, spread across several systems. Roger Gough chairs the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), which is centred on the NHS, Medway Council and ourselves but which brings together a broader group of partners concerned with the health, wellbeing and care of the population.

The ICP was required to develop an Integrated Care Strategy to a deadline of the end of last year (!); this was successfully delivered, but of necessity is being developed further and is a starting point for more detailed and specific plans.

Over a hard winter, we worked closely with the NHS to seek to manage the pressures on both of our services, using technology to reduce the risk of crisis, increasing care and support at home and developing Integrated Hubs to manage transfers of care. Much of this is, however, work in progress and the severe pressures have meant that we still see far greater reliance on short-term beds than we would wish (and which contribute to our budget pressures). Nonetheless, we continue to develop our local work on integration, and at a national level we await the publication of Dame Patricia Hewitt's review of integrated care systems, which we have reason to hope can strengthen the truly local nature of health and care systems.

Children's Services

July saw our Children's Services rated Outstanding by Ofsted

This has been a journey of a little over a decade from being rated Inadequate through two Leaders of the Council (Sir Paul Carter and Roger Gough) and four portfolio holders. Ofsted stated that "Children are at the centre of Kent County Council's culture and practice. ... Outstanding practice is evident for children in care and care experienced young people as they clearly benefit from the support they receive and make good progress."

There have also been important national developments, with the recent publication of the government's response to the case reviews in the shocking cases of Star Hobson and Arthur

Labinjo-Hughes, to the Competition and Markets Authority's study on Children's social care and - most wide-ranging - the Independent Review on Children's Services led by Josh McAllister.

The McAllister review set out a comprehensive vision of services led by early help and prevention, and we are already taking many of the approaches that it advocated. The government's response in the strategy Stable Homes, Built on Love builds on this, though it relies extensively on pilot schemes and commits quite modest resources compared with the ask of the McAllister review. We are very open to playing our part in developing these approaches.

In February KCC was designated one of 14 'trailblazer' councils for developing in the government's Family Hubs programme, which is designed to provide integrated support for families and children. This gives access to £183,000 initial funding and to more than £10 million transformation funding for implementation of the model over the next 2 years.

Community services consultation

This consultation, running from January, closed on Monday (27 March). A decision on next steps is due to be taken by Cabinet in July.

Migration, asylum and UASC

2022 saw a large number of small boat crossings and as part of this the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) referred to KCC was a record 1,390. (There have been 266 so far this year). However, because of the agreements that we reached with government in 2020-21:

- Better financial arrangements mean that the Kent council tax payer is not exposed to these costs.
- The National Transfer Scheme was made mandatory, and some 1,640 UASC young people have been transferred under this scheme since June 2020 to other councils.
- We have around 500 UASC in our care, just above the 0.1% level set by the 2016 Immigration Act, and also provide a Reception and Safe Care service for 120 UASC before they go to other councils.

The large overall number of asylum seeker arrivals, along with other schemes and the national backlog in processing claims, has meant that we have seen 5 hotels for accommodating asylum seekers, 3 'bridging hotels' for Afghan families and 2 UASC hotels open in the last year. This, coupled with concerns over how plans for increased asylum accommodation in the south east is to be reconciled with other duties such as homelessness, led all 14 Kent council leaders to write to the Home Secretary in November. We have since met the Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick, and have worked with our District and Borough colleagues to oppose unsuitable proposals for use of hotels, in some cases with success.

Government has this week announced plans to end the reliance on hotels in accommodating both asylum seekers and those on the Afghan resettlement schemes. The Illegal Migration Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, will also raise important challenges, notably in relation to UASC.

Ukraine

Kent has welcomed the biggest number of refugees from Ukraine of any area in England. The initial tasks of carrying out checks, establishing systems and making payments were very challenging. In the year since guests started arriving under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, 3,274 guests have come into the County (and all told 4,271 have been matched with hosts in Kent – not all have yet arrived). 1,506 'programme leavers' have moved on – 46% into

rented accommodation, many of the rest returning to Ukraine or neighbouring countries – but at present there are 1,767 guests staying with 854 sponsors. There are 349 Ukrainian children in our primary schools and 234 in our secondary schools.

We have responded to the challenge of potential sponsorship breakdown, especially as many Ukrainian guests reached the six-month minimum sponsorship stage. Moving ahead of government and many other councils, we announced in October that, for the rest of the financial year, we would pay a higher rate to hosts and further increase payments linked to the number of guests. The ending of sponsorship arrangements, which was anticipated to be at around 60% of the total, came in at 9%. We have extended these higher payments for another year while working with our District council colleagues on longer-term housing options.

SEND

The Ofsted/CQC revisit in September produced a deeply disappointing outcome, with inspectors concluding that the Kent area had made insufficient progress in all 9 of the areas of weakness identified in the 2019 Written Statement of Action.

With new leadership on both the officer side (Sarah Hammond as Director of Children's Services, Christine McInnes bringing Education and SEND back together) and politically (Rory Love as Cabinet Member for Education with SEND leadership responsibilities), we have produced a comprehensive plan of improvement to address the long-running challenges in this service.

We have also reached agreement with the Department for Education regarding the Safety Valve to address the accumulated deficit on High Needs Funding, estimated to reach around £142m by the end of this financial year. The agreement aims to bring High Needs Funding into balance by 2027-28, with £140m of the cumulative deficit reached by that point (forecast to be £222m) covered by the DfE and £82m by KCC. This accompanies our plans to deliver major service change that can both serve children and families better and put us on a financially sustainable path.

The DfE published the latest round of Safety Valve agreements, including Kent's, on Thursday 16 March. A summary of the Safety Valve agreement is published on KCC's website.

We are undertaking this programme of change, meeting the challenges of both the Safety Valve and the Ofsted/ CQC revisit, at a time when the government has published the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. There are many features of the Plan that are welcome, though it is doubtful if it goes far enough in helping establish a sustainable system.

Secondary offer day

Secondary school offer day (1 March) saw record numbers; 19,007 families from Kent (up 695 on the previous year), and 22,620 in total (up 731) applied for a place for their child. Although the proportion of those securing their first preference fell slightly (from 79.6% to 78.2%), the absolute number rose, as did the proportion securing a second, third or fourth preference, so the proportion allocated (4.6%) was the lowest since 2018.

This nonetheless affects almost 900 children across the county, and it is important that any affected families are aware that this is not the end of the process. The next stage will be the second round of offers (reallocation) on 25 April.

Buses and BSIP

We had major challenges last summer over bus services; while we were still taking forward the £2.3m reduction in subsidies agreed in the 2022/23 budget, the bus industry was facing

a crisis brought on by higher fuel costs, staff (especially driver) shortages and falls in usage. This was a national issue, but had particular salience in Kent because of the high usage of commercial bus services for school travel and the usage of the Kent Travel Saver. Our Transport team did a remarkable job in working with operators to reduce the impact of route cancellations, especially on school journeys.

Members were briefed on 17 March on our Bus Service Improvement Plan funding award. After very long delays (we were first given our indicative allocation of £34 million over 2022-25 a year ago, we now have agreement to deploy just under £19 million (representing the first two years' funding) over the next year, with a roughly two thirds/ one third split between capital and revenue. While this has taken an inordinate amount of time and is not on the scale or in the form that we might have hoped for, it can deliver some real improvements and help protect and sustain the network, in particular school transport, as well as offsetting the proposed increase in the cost of the Kent Travel Saver.

Nationally, the announcement in February of an extra £155 million government funding to extend support (such as Bus Recovery Grant) until 30 June buys time to establish a somewhat longer-term package, but the sector remains under severe pressure. We still have major questions to address about the best way to secure our network, and school transport in particular, and on that basis, we have, as the leader committed to at the October County Council, established a cross-party Member group to review and advise on the way ahead. The group, chaired by Nick Chard, has held its first meeting.

Active Travel

As in previous rounds of Active Travel funding, we submitted our proposals for funding under Tranche 4 to Active Travel England. 7 schemes will be funded, and details of this will be released in May.

Roads and potholes

Winter weather has taken its heavy toll on our roads. In the December/ January period, highway reports were five times the level of the same period a year ago. While constrained by tight funding and inflationary pressures, we have since January been stepping up the pace of repairs; Members of the public will, I think, have observed the increased number of local road closures that reflect highway works. 14,000 potholes have now been repaired and 68,414 square meetings of road has been patched.

The budget announcement of £200 million for roads funding, meaning some £6 million for Kent, is a welcome addition and we are looking to deploy it as quickly as possible.

Borders, Brock and EES

We experienced two major incidents of disruption at the border last year, with the all too familiar impacts on traffic and travel, affecting our residents, communities and businesses. The first was an after effect of the P&O crisis and had a major effect around Easter; the second (in July) resulted from non-attendance at the port by the French border authorities, the PAF. After a period of greater calm, and with the Easter break being our second consecutive holiday period without the Brock barrier being put into force, we have now seen further disruption as PAF capacity has not matched the number of coaches needing to be processed.

This confirms that the threat of disruption is never far away; the biggest longer-term risk is the potential introduction of the EU's External Entry System. EES has been scheduled for introduction at various points, most recently this spring – but now delayed to at least the back end of this year and it is widely believed that it will not now be introduced until late

2024. But it remains a serious challenge and was recognised as such in the final communique after the Prime Minister's recent summit with President Macron. Work continues with the Department for Transport on developing short, medium and long-term responses to the border issue and we expect reports back in the summer. In the meantime, an important first step has been our securing £45 million for improvements to the configuration and fluidity of the Dover port under round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund. (This successful KCC bid came alongside successful District bids; taken together, this brings £123 million in LUF funding into Kent). This is not a solution in itself, but can support greater resilience at the border, raising the threshold for when measures such as the use of Operation Brock are required.

Staying with longer-term plans for strategic road investment, the Department for Transport announced shortly before the budget that construction of the Lower Thames Crossing will be delayed for two years until 2026. Transport Secretary Mark Harper nonetheless stated that 'We remain committed to the Lower Thames Crossing.' Reflecting the same pressures on the DfT budget, RIS3 schemes including Dover access and Brenley Corner, have also been pushed back.

London ULEZ

The Mayor of London is pressing ahead with his proposal to expand the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to the outer London border, with implementation planned for August. During last year's consultation on ULEZ, KCC argued that the scheme would not be acceptable without an extension of the scrappage scheme to areas bordering London, including affected areas of Kent. This has not been accepted, nor has the proposal taken account of our concern about the nature of the evidence base for taking the ULEZ beyond existing Air Quality Management Areas in London.

The Leader has therefore written to the Mayor setting out our concerns and making clear that we will not continue Section 7 works to install warning signage on our road network. Following my letter, we have had the offer of a meeting with TfL, which we will take up. So far we have not joined the legal action undertaken by four London Boroughs along with Surrey County Council, but we are working with London boroughs and counties surrounding London, and no options for future action are off the table.

Environment and waste

On 23 March DEFRA issued the long-awaited regulations and guidance implementing provisions of the Environment Act 2021, covering a range of issues from consistency in waste collection to responsibility for Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Biodiversity. Most districts in Kent already have a separate food waste collection but the Environment Act requires that all councils must do this. KCC will be the lead authority for the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy and were expecting extra funding for this and for our new Biodiversity duties. We will be further assessing the implications of these regulations and delivering them.

KCC has won its bid for £1.83m from the latest round of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which is to part fund new heating systems, double glazing, LED lights and Building Management Systems at five KCC buildings. The grant is a real saving to KCC's hard pressed building maintenance budget and will also reduce ongoing energy costs.

KCC has launched a third round of the SolarTogether scheme which uses collective buying power to get a good price on solar panels and batteries for Kent households. The first two

rounds of the scheme have been very successful. All Kent districts and Medway are joining with us to promote the scheme and registrations are open now.

It is over a year since, following a big response to our public consultation, we confirmed that we would keep the booking system for our Household Waste Recycling Centres. Our surveys of customer satisfaction get a big response. The results are on the KCC website and show 96% are satisfied or very satisfied with their visit and 95% find the booking system easy or very easy to use. Same day bookings are increasingly popular and 65% of customers say they've booked on the day itself. KCC has been shortlisted for an LGC award in the Digital Impact category for the booking system.

Last May we opened our new HWRC at Allington, which is highly energy efficient and environmentally advanced. It is next to our existing Energy from Waste plant, which along with high recycling rates, ensures that only an irreducibly tiny amount of Kent's waste goes to landfill.

Dungeness and nuclear

We have for some time worked with Damian Collins MP and Folkestone & Hythe District Council to promote Dungeness as a site for new Small Modular Reactor (SMR) nuclear power generation. We have engaged with potential industry providers and other key stakeholders. In the budget this month the Chancellor launched Great British Nuclear, which will oversee a programme of expansion of nuclear energy. In contrast to the previous approach of choosing a limited number of sites, GBN will invite new nuclear builds and assess projects on their merits. This will be an opportunity for us to put forward a case based on commercial and technical viability rather than a government list of approved sites