Reforming Kent 2025-2028

FOREWORD

On 1st May 2025, Reform UK won 57 out of 81 seats which gave us overall control of Kent County Council.

My fellow members and I campaigned on a promise that we would come in with fresh eyes and fire in our bellies and be unapologetic in our mission to put the people of Kent right at the heart of every decision that we make.

We are here to represent you and to make decisions that benefit you. We are here to be advocates for those in need, young and old, and to make sure that those in the middle, on whose shoulders the financial burden increasingly rests, know that we spend their money as carefully as we spend our own.

KCC's main challenge is how to do more, with less. We are facing big challenges.

As a population we are getting older. Couples are not having as many babies as they used to. The social fabric of our towns and villages has been altered by years of uncontrolled immigration and overspill from London. Crime is high, and trust is at an all-time low.

Kent has been pressured into building more and more houses. More children are being diagnosed with special educational needs and crime typically goes unsolved.

There is an increased perception that the welfare system is too generous and is open to abuse with people divided into 'workers or shirkers'.

It's no wonder we are all feeling the pressure and that KCC is in debt.

But we are determined to turn it around.

As Leader, I'm putting efficiency first and have tasked a new Cabinet team with special responsibility for Local Government Efficiency with the job of carrying out a full examination of all Council procedures, procurement and employment.

As for looking after our vulnerable people and in the continued absence of a joined-up plan from Central Government, we will take a preventative approach, investing in services that reduce dependency that help people stay healthy and independent for longer. Our Adult Social Care team will embrace AI and digital tools to deliver smarter, more responsive support.

Our young people in care (which due to our legal obligations, must include unaccompanied asylum-seeking children whose costs are fully met by the Home Office), will be gradually moved out of privately run care homes into homes owned

and run by KCC. This removes KCC's dependence on an increasingly expensive private sector and allows us to spend less money to look after these children to our own high standards.

To ensure our teachers receive the support they deserve, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) will prioritise prevention, early intervention, and reintegration pathways. By being closely aligned with schools, PRUs will provide targeted support for disruptive pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

We will also work with the PCC to ban smartphones in Kent's schools, allowing children to concentrate on their lessons, develop meaningful, face-to-face friendships and remain free of the pressures of online life for the majority of each day.

There will be new emphasis on personal responsibility and helping people to make sound choices that lead to better life outcomes. We do not believe that adults should be infantilised or treated as potential victims. KCC is here to help, not to take over residents' lives.

You will notice a change of messaging in our public health, education and social care literature to reflect our new, empowering approach.

If someone is in receipt of taxpayers' money for whatever reason, they will be made aware of that fact and encouraged to use that money wisely and frugally.

As Leader I will continue to push back against central government if I feel that the policies do not align with my own vision of what's best for Kent.

I want to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and form ticking associated with DEI and find more meaningful ways for the council to meet its Public Sector Equality duties.

On the environment we will replace the Net Zero 2030 target with an energy efficiency plan focused on financial returns and investigate opportunities to create additional revenue streams, and we will rescind the County Council's climate emergency declaration which is stifling debate.

We'll lobby government to promote Dungeness as the right site for a small nuclear reactor and we'll work with water companies to clean up our seas and rivers, develop a long-term water resources plan for Kent and ensure that drainage works to prevent flooding.

Our coastal communities, ignored for so long will benefit from a targeted Kent & Medway Business Fund for startups, high-growth, or fast-growing businesses and we'll tackle inequalities that are especially pronounced in our seaside towns that can damage hard working families' access to secure employment.

Kent's farmers will have our full support. We value their year-round hard work that delivers food security for us all and protects our precious greenbelt, agricultural land and natural wildlife habitats.

Our roads are used by all of us, every single day so to improve road quality we'll remove obstacles and inefficiencies across Kent's highways and work directly with local contractors and suppliers stripping away wasteful overheads and duplication to increase productivity.

My first decision as Leader to fly only the flags of Kent, St George and the Union on the exterior of County Hall is further proof that under my tenure, every single person is represented and nobody is left out.

My vision for Kent is that of a happy, thriving and tolerant society built on merit rather than enforced diversity targets. One unified county, proud of its history and optimistic for its future. A place where the residents feel safer, healthier and wealthier knowing that their political representatives try to get the best value for every pound spent.

A green and pleasant 'garden of England' where farmers feel valued in ensuring our food security, where they are recognised as custodians of the countryside *protecting our land* from excessively large solar farms and housing developments.

A county that makes the most of its unique position as the gateway into our nation and also out to the rest of the world.

In short, because Kent boasts historical buildings, picturesque towns and villages, bustling shopping centres, rolling green hills, burgeoning vineyards, excellent restaurants and pubs, miles of stunning coastline plus fast access to London, it's easily one of the best counties in the UK in which to live, work and visit.

Linden Kemkaran

Leader, Kent County Council

Draft Strategic Statement: Reforming Kent 2025-2028

Introduction:

This strategy sets out our vision for Kent from 2025-2028. It is shorter in timeframe due to the Governments proposals for local government reorganisation and the creation of new council structures in Kent and Medway in 2028. However, this shortened timeframe does not weaken or limit our ambition for Kent or for Kent County Council.

This document is not intended as an exhaustive list of everything the Council does but is focused on establishing a reformed council, the ambitions we want to meet and the objectives and priorities we will deliver.

The scale of the challenges facing our country and our county today, and in the future, require the council and our administration to be agile to the changing circumstances which we face. As such, Reforming Kent is considered a live document, and as an administration we will update as necessary through Cabinet to ensure it remains relevant and useful for our residents, our partners and our staff.

OUR VISION:

Kent is a place where the residents feel safer, healthier and wealthier and know that their political representatives try to get the best value for every pound spent.

OUR COMMITMENTS TO OUR RESIDENTS ARE THAT WE WILL:

- ✓ Keep council tax increases as low as possible but will maintain the quality-of-service provision.
- ✓ Ask the difficult questions and challenge long held assumptions within the county council.
- ✓ Not accept the status quo where it fails our residents whether as service users or taxpayers.
- ✓ Have a ruthless focus on value for money, cost efficiency and common sense.
- ✓ Expect those who we support to respect the services and monies provided to them.
- ✓ Reward those who work hard and achieve on merit rather than tick boxes.

Additional commitments and policies may be made over the life of this document as circumstances change and as we ensure that we can achieve our financial plan and deliver against our efficiency review.

AIM 1: PUTTING KENT RESIDENTS FIRST

Our objectives

1. **Make sure the people of Kent are heard, from local town halls right through to Parliament:** The victory for Reform UK in the local elections was driven by a growing sense of exasperation of a state failing to listen to the legitimate concerns and needs of its citizens over the way their taxes are being used, and the diminishing quality of services they are receiving in return. Successive Governments of all political persuasions have taken Kent for granted for too long. KCC is only one part of the public sector that needs reform, but Reform UK Kent will do all we can by bringing the people's voice to the fore in the decisions made in town halls, county hall, and in Parliament.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - Continue to work with partners at both local, regional, and the national level to resist the inappropriate placement of large-scale asylum provision in unsuitable areas in Kent - particularly where public services are already under significant pressure - and push for reform of the asylum system to remove these concerns from our local communities.
   - Lobby government to ensure that Kent does not continue to be unfairly burdened by illegal migrants and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and that dispersal is fairly distributed across the country.
   - Push back on excessively high levels of new housing proposed and inappropriate solar farm development planned for Kent which is threatening the character of many local communities.

2. **Work with the government to find long-term solutions to the challenges at the border:** It is the clear responsibility of the U.K. government to manage the border at the Kent short straits. The repeated failure of the UK Government to stop the small boats crossings directly impacts Kent's residents and security but also undermines our county's reputation nationally and internationally. Operation BROCK, the use of the M20 to hold HGVs when there is disruption at the border, impinges on many Kent residents' quality of life, but it also harms our county's economy and economic competitiveness. We will hold the government to account to deliver its obligations to the residents of Kent to better manage the border; in doing so, we also pledge to do whatever KCC can as both a highways and social care authority, to support their efforts.

Our priorities will be to:

- Ensure the Home Office manages the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) dispersal scheme in a timely and effective manner, so as not to place an unsafe burden on KCC Children's Services, impacting our capacity to support Kent children.
- Work with the Department for Transport, and our partners in Kent to find a long-term solution to Operation BROCK, which does not impact on Kent residents or businesses day-to-day.
- Ensure that the introduction of EES, the EU Entry-Exit Visa Scheme, operates in such a way that does not add a significant additional burden to the Kent road network, and does not require semi-permanent emergency arrangements to be put in place.

3. **Seek fair funding from Government which properly recognises Kent's unique needs:** The pressure on KCC services from being the strategic council for the UK's gateway to Europe is a significant, additional, and unique burden on Kent council taxpayers which we believe is not fairly recognised or compensated for by the Government. Whether it is foreign HGVs on our roads or the impact of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on our children's social services, the cost to Kent is both direct in what it costs the county council, and indirect given the wider strain it places on our budgets and services. That needs to be acknowledged and better reflected in the support the Government provides to KCC.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Respond to the Government proposals to change grant distribution to local government – ensuring more money is provided to address Kent's needs.
   - Lobby at national level for a revised, needs-based funding formula for children's social care that recognises the burden from Other Local Authorities placing so many of their Looked After Children into Kent.
   - Call on Government to support a fairer, more sustainable funding model for road maintenance, one that allows for planning and prevention rather than just emergency fixes.
   - Make the case to Government for Kent to receive its fair share of funding currently being taken by the government from the Dartford Crossing and from the HGV Road User Levy collected from foreign HGV's coming through the Kent Ports.

4. **Stand up for the interests of all Kent residents in Local Government Reorganisation:** The government's policy of undertaking a wholesale Local Government Reorganisation – merging the District Councils and County Council to form a new single-tier unitary Councils - is a huge and costly

distraction to the real business of running local councils and delivering high quality services. We are sceptical that local government reorganisation in Kent will yield the anticipated savings and benefits expected by Government. Indeed, to the contrary, we expect it will harm service quality whilst placing huge additional increases in Kent residents' council tax to fund it.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will continue to push Government to ensure that residents interests are at the heart of LGR and that the resident voice is embedded in our proposals through local networks.
- Engage transparently and respectfully in the LGR process with all councils in Kent and Medway, even where we disagree on LGR proposals, so all partners act in the best interests of Kent and Medway residents.
- Ensure that continuity of service provision and service quality is not put at risk by any LGR proposals, either through the development of LGR proposals, or through the implementation of any changes imposed on Kent by the Government.

5. **Support local businesses to attract investment and create job opportunities for people in Kent:** The public sector cannot be sustainable without a thriving and growing private sector economy to fund it, at national or local level. The failure to deliver economic growth drives higher demand for public services, which in turn become more reliant on an ever-smaller and ever more strained private sector economy to fund them. Every area in the country needs to support economic growth to break this downward spiral in our economy and our public services. In Kent, this means supporting local businesses, the vast majority of which are small to medium-sized enterprises to create the jobs, attract investment and upskill our workforce to drive economic growth.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will back major infrastructure projects – which bring new skilled jobs into Kent - such as the Port of Dover 2050 initiative to drive investment into the county and utilise Kent's unique geographical position.
- We will deliver the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan to reduce the 21% of the Kent working age population who are economically inactive, and through the Connect to Work programme, help up to 2900 residents who are facing barriers to employment receive personalised coaching and support to find work.
- We will lobby the Government to mandate the reuse of the high-speed international train stations at Ebbsfleet International and Ashford Internation so as to maximise the economic and travel benefits and end the scandal of this critical infrastructure lying dormant and unused.

6. **Protect our countryside and give strong support to Kent's farmers and rural pursuits and communities:** Kent has a large population and densely populated towns, but it remains in the hearts and minds of many of its residents, businesses and visitors an historic rural county. This is drawn from not only our county's unique character, but also our national and international reputation as the Garden of England. It is imperative that we protect our rural heritage, rural businesses and rural communities and support them to thrive. Kent must not only exist to serve the needs and overspill from a growing London population.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Resist Government plans to cover agricultural land in solar farms.
   - Work with District and Borough Councils to resist inappropriate developments on the edges of towns and villages.
   - Support rural public transport.
   - Work with Kent Police to ensure patrols in rural crime hotspots.

AIM 2: REFORMING KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

Our objectives

1. **Deliver improvements to the visible services that matter most to the majority of Kent residents:** Given the demand pressures on social care an ever increasing proportion of the KCC budget has been spent on an ever smaller number of high-need individuals in both adults and children's social care. Whilst KCC is legally obliged to meet the needs of the vulnerable, it cannot be right that this comes at the expense of services to the majority of Kent residents who fund KCC through their council tax. If KCC's role and spend is to be valued by the majority of its residents, they must see and feel more benefit from it.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Through the budget setting process, ensuring a fairer proportion of new monies are invested in visible community services, which have been underfunded due to central government's inability to find long-term solutions for social care.
   - Ensure that KCC only takes on the responsibilities which residents expect it to and which are in the best interests of Kent. The delivery of government programmes, even when directly funded, places additional pressures on the KCC management and support services, whilst distracting KCC from its core purpose.
   - Improve performance management arrangements for all KCC services by reviewing current key performance indicators and targets, and develop a range of productivity measures for each KCC service, so we can target improving productivity and drive value for money.

2. **Reduce the KCC debt burden, releasing more monies back into front line services:** KCC's debt burden is significant at over £700m. This debt has been accrued over many decades by the decisions of previous political administrations. Whilst it is possible for KCC to service this debt, in doing so, it takes away vital monies from day-to-day frontline services to the tune of almost £80m a year. That is money that Kent residents need invested back into their frontline services. We do not accept that there is a need to increase the debt burden in order to facilitate and support the KCC capital budget. A better balance must be achieved.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Continue to drive down KCC's overall debt burden, through a focus on debt management, asset sales and strict control of new capital expenditure.

- Ring fence any released debt servicing monies to visible community and infrastructure services through the KCC budget process.
- Maximise the use of external funding to support the capital programme, additional new KCC borrowing will be the absolute exception.

3. **Make every penny count, using a common-sense approach and DOLGE to find efficiency savings and income generation opportunities:** Many public sector organisations lose focus and expand beyond their core purpose through the layering of new activities from local politicians and governments. Nothing is ever stopped or closed only new, often unfunded, burdens are added. Because public sector budgets are guaranteed by taxation, the public sector also doesn't have the inherent drive found in the private sector to ruthlessly manage costs. The guaranteed funding of the public sector through taxation makes it inherently different to the private sector, where organisations must manage costs and take decisive action to control them. Through our Department of Local Government Efficiency, we will systematically look at every penny of KCC spend, taking learning and best practice from the private sector to drive us to better control of costs, wherever possible. No saving is too small for an organisation facing the financial pressures KCC is facing, and we will rigorously look at each KCC department to determine if the cost base is justified by the service outcomes.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Systematically undertake a review of all KCC contracts and assess whether they are delivering value for money and are fit for purpose, and reopening contract negotiations where they are not we are in a position to do so.
   - Review contract management arrangements in all services across the council ensuring that there is sufficient focus and rigour on managing contracts once they've been agreed, and taking remedial action where providers are not delivering to the standards expected.
   - We will use technology, AI and automation to ensure services are innovative and strip out excessive cost and time.
   - We will look for new income generation opportunities from KCC services, and continue to support the 100% wholly owned KCC trading company – Commercial Services Group – to operate independently and commercially within the market, providing a strong dividend return to KCC.

4. **Use Kent's buying power to support local jobs and keep investment in the county:** KCC is a huge purchaser of goods and services, with an annual procured spend of £1.47bn. This presents an opportunity to support jobs and businesses in the Kent economy. The recently introduced changes in procurement law to broaden our supplier base with Kent businesses, keeping

more of KCC's money in the local Kent economy. The voluntary and community sector plays an important role as both a service provider and a core pillar of Kent's wider civic society and we will look to strengthen our engagement and partnership with the sector. Where the market is unable to meet KCC service requirements at an affordable price, we will look at the available in-house options for ensuring service delivery.

Our priorities will be to:

- Encourage more Kent based businesses to bid for KCC contracts, with an associated increase in KCC spend staying within Kent.
- Maximise the opportunities within the Procurement Act to minimise barriers to entry for SMEs in bidding for KCC goods and services and use Social Value to drive additional benefits for local Kent communities.
- Explore opportunities to work with partners voluntary and community sector to improve the lives of residents and design services that meet their needs.

5. **Ensure the council focusses on delivering better outcomes that make a difference, not just manging process:** One of the greatest frustrations of residents is that when they want better and more responsive delivery from their public services, politicians at national and local level just offer up changed processes rather than real change. But even more frustratingly, we know these frustrations are felt as equally by our staff, who come to work to make a difference to the residents and communities they serve, not be wrapped up in unnecessary box ticking that simply gets in the way of them doing their job. We will continue to invest in our staff development, ensuring they are fully supported in delivering vital services in often challenging environment, and removing barriers to real change. We will continue to meet our commitments under the Public Sector Equality Duty but want to do so in a more meaningful way that has wider public, partner and staff support.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - We will ensure that we have the right people in the right roles to deliver against our ambitions and meet the future challenges – ensuring there is meritocracy, fairness and equality in recruitment.
   - We will review governance arrangements to ensure they are as streamlined as possible, reducing bureaucracy to free up staff to focus on service delivery.
   - Continually review staff numbers, structures and salaries to ensure every role has a real impact for the residents of Kent, and through the People Strategy continue to invest in staff training and professionalism.

- We will devise a new set of Corporate Equality Objectives when the current objectives expire, and ensure our policies which support the Public Sector Equality Duty are fit for purpose.

6. **Scrap unattainable Net Zero 2030 and focus environment policy on direct benefits to Kent residents:** The rush to declare a climate emergency and the introduction of Net Zero targets in councils, without any thought as to the practicality or financial burden they placed on hard pressed council taxpayers was a mistake. Instead of taking a pragmatic approach needed by residents and businesses to cope with increasing costs of energy in heating their homes or running their businesses, it overly focused on carbon emissions targets which have little meaningful value to the daily lives of Kent residents. We want to refocus our approach to the environment with a stronger focus on adapting to changes in our weather, stronger environmental stewardship, visible improvements and a focus on the resident.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - We will rescind the County Councils Climate Emergency Declaration of 2019, which is scaring young people, adversely impacting on small businesses and stifling debate.
   - We will bring forward a new Energy and Low Emissions Strategy that focusses on delivering long-term practical solutions for affordable energy and support to Kent residents.
   - We will ensure there is an effective waste management and recycling service that is value for money and improves rates of recycling through a simpler and efficient process.
   - We will move our focus onto helping businesses and residents adapt to our changing climate by conserving water and other natural resources.

AIM 3: SUPPORTING RESIDENTS THAT NEED HELP

Our objectives

1. **Embed a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and empowering people to take personal responsibility:** The increasing withdrawal of universal preventative and early-intervention services, whilst understandable given budget pressures, has begun to bite public services as demand soars and needs grow. These needs may have been met better and more affordably had an early intervention approach been in place. It is also right for people to take personal responsibility for their own lives and preventative services can support people to make choices that improve their health but also empower them, reducing dependency on the state in the longer term. The short term approach has been a false economy and does not deliver best value for the taxpayer in the longer term.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Give families access to the right support, intervening early to ensure wherever possible families can stay together and reducing the number of children that go into care.
   - Where it is financially viable, we will invest in prevention. We will also campaign for this area to receive direct funding, especially for prevention in social care.
   - Put in place practical measures that improve people's lives, intervening early to support people to help themselves and make sensible life choices without a nanny state attitude

2. **Ensure every child has the chance to grow up safe and secure, free from online harm:** Ensuring our children grow up in a safe and secure environment is an ever-increasing challenge, whether they are cared for by their parents, their wider family or the local authority. Increasingly pervasive influences from the internet, social media and peer pressure means many of our children are exposed to risks and dangers that were inconceivable just a couple of decades ago. This impacts on their mental health and drives demand for health services and disability benefits, ruining their life chances and burdening the taxpayer with excessive and unnecessary costs. Protecting childhood is critical to making sure the next generation can live a happy and fulfilling life and ensuring a safe and stable society in the decades to come.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Reinstate parenting hubs to support families and help them stay together.
   - Encourage parents to feed children a health nutritious diet, give them plenty of fresh air and exercise and reduce screen time to an absolute minimum.

- Work with the PCC to ban smartphones in Kent's schools, allowing children to concentrate on their lessons, and protect them from online pressures.
- We will support Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to prioritise prevention, early intervention, and reintegration. Through close alignment with schools, PRUs will provide targeted support for disruptive pupils without and EHCP.
- Work with schools to lobby central government to redraft the curriculum to encourage rigorous teaching in the core skills of reading, writing and maths and drive out ideological social trends.
- To ensure our teachers receive the support they deserve, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) will prioritise prevention, early intervention, and reintegration pathways. By being closely aligned with schools, PRUs will provide targeted support for disruptive pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

3. **To deliver good care for our most vulnerable because they deserve to be treated with dignity:** Social care services have been failed by successive governments with the absence of a coherent and sustainably funded plan to meet the vast challenges faced. Complexity of need has increased alongside the demographic pressures of an ageing population and adult social care services in particular, continue to place increasing pressure on the Council's budget. The system has simply not been modernised to catch up with the growing demand or to deliver the type of support people want. With the right support people can live independently for longer, keeping people out of residential care and in their own homes. This not only offers greater quality of life but costs far less to the taxpayer. The use of technology is woefully underutilised both in terms of supporting people's independence and streamlining assessment processes. Outdated and costly care is not delivering the support people deserve and must be reformed, fit for the 21st Century.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - Look at options to use AI and tech to create efficient assessment processes, that speed up getting the right support to people as quickly and as effectively as possible.
   - We will bring some Children's homes capacity back in house, where it makes financial sense, to ensure we are not paying inflated prices set by some providers.
     We will work with our local workforce, providers and VCSE to ensure good care and the right support is available at a local level.

4. **Work with care providers and the NHS to ensure that the care system is more sustainable and joined up:** The demand pressures that KCC services are facing are also faced by our partners in the NHS. We want to work with our NHS partners to ensure a more joined approach to meeting the needs of our local residents. Our residents quality of life should not be compromised by the failures of successive national governments to develop a sustainable care system, which works seamlessly with the health system. We will work closely with our NHS partners to develop a local care system that is built around collaboration and partnership, not duplication and inefficiency and ensure that the resident's needs are at the heart of this.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - We will improve our engagement and relationship with care providers, so that both commissioners and providers can work together to ensure care markets are more sustainable.
   - We will work with our partners in the NHS to develop a stronger joint commissioning programme across a range of services where we have shared clients or are commissioning from the same providers.
   - We will review how Disabled Facilities Grants are managed to ensure they are accessible, fair, and responsive to people's needs, and ensuring residents are not passed around between different KCC and District authorities.
   - We will hold the Government to account to ensure any recommendations from the Casey Review are funded, sensible, and subject to consultation, including any proposal for a National Care Service.

5. **Recognise and support the dedication of our county's unpaid carers:** The family is the backbone of a compassionate and caring society. Nowhere is that more evident than in the love, dedication, and support that family carers provide on an unpaid basis, often sacrificing the quality of their own life to meet the needs of their loved ones. This informal care reduces the care burden on the council exponentially, and the role of adults and young carers should be recognised, supported and celebrated given their selfless contribution.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - Refresh the KCC Carers strategy, and seek to join up our support for carers across health and housing services.
   - Better engage with carers support groups around the support and recognition carers can be provided.
   - Ensure that the life chances of young carers are not inhibited by their caring responsibilities – and they continue to enjoy the benefits of childhood.

- Work with District and Borough Councils to support planning applications for 'granny annexes' for families wishing to care for older relatives at home and lobby ministers to explore tax breaks for adult carers who do this.

6. **Improve processes and outcomes for our SEND services while tackling the unsustainable growth in demand:** We will continue to improve our SEND service, ensuring that those families and young people who are eligible for SEND support receive it in a timely, efficient, and professional manner. At the same time we must also reduce the demands placed on the SEND budget given the existential pressure it places on the wider KCC budget, including increasingly the adult social care budget, as children with SEND need transition to adulthood. This demand is driven by a national crisis in SEND demand, which must be urgently addressed by the government, given the systemic challenges it is placing not just on children's services budgets, but on those of the NHS, schools and home to school transport as well.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - Focus investment on prevention and early intervention.
   - Deliver SEND services by increasing local provision, by expanding Specialist Resource Units.
   - Improve the timeliness of undertaking EHCPs and communicating progress transparently and effectively with families waiting for decisions, utilising tools such as AI to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
   - Examine each SEND diagnosis to ensure it reaches the threshold for KCC funding
   - Continually review the Home to Transport delivery systems to ensure best value for taxpayer money. Enlarge the provision of Personal Transport Budgets so that parents can take responsibility for getting their child to and from school.
   - Help parents to properly understand and fulfil their obligations and responsibilities towards their own children before turning to KCC for assistance.

AIM 4: BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES

Objectives

1. **Support Kent Police to keep our communities safe:** The first responsibility of the state is to keep its citizens safe, yet an increasing sense of lawlessness is blighting many of our local communities. Often it is the cumulative impact of lower-level crimes, such as anti-social behaviour and shoplifting, which often goes unaddressed and unpunished, which harms the day-to-day quality of life in our local communities. At the same time, our overstretched police officers are being asked to do more, with less, whilst under an unreasonable level of scrutiny which disempowers them from doing their job and seeks to erode public trust in our police. KCC will re-invigorate its strategic partnership with Kent Police.

   Our priorities will be to:
   - KCC will re-invigorate its strategic partnership with Kent Police, recognising that the KCC and Kent Police working together are a powerful force for good in our county.
   - Refresh the Kent Community Safety Plan so there is a stronger focus on anti-social behaviour and work with local Crime and Disorder Reduction Units to design local interventions that have local community support.
   - Lobby the Government for more funding for Kent Police to cover the additional burdens placed on Kent Police from policing the border, the current funding of which is insufficient from Government.
   - Working with our partners and the VCSE sector, focus on tackling domestic abuse and violence against woman and girls, which is prevalent in too many of our communities
   - We will support the role of our Community Wardens within our local communities but ensure this is refocussed on the areas that matter most to our residents, with a renewed focus on community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour.

2. **Tackle inequality blighting many of our coastal communities:** Differences between areas of Kent contribute to the county's unique and special character. However, differences born of increasing inequality and social deprivation, especially between some of Kent's coastal communities and the rest of the county, has grown to unacceptable levels. In too many coastal communities employment, health and housing outcomes are considerably poorer. This cycle of decline is then compounded through inappropriate placements of vulnerable people i.e. children in care, former prisoners, asylum seekers from other areas into those local communities, increasing community numbers and placing additional burden on local public services. We have to end this cycle of decline in our poorest coastal communities.

Our priorities will be to:

- Enable local business to flourish, supporting economic growth and jobs - increasing the number of Kent and Medway Business Fund loans and targeting our coastal communities.
- Support the work of KCC Public Health to focus on 'Marmot' model intervention work in our coastal communities.
- Reinstate parenting hubs to support families and help them stay together.
- Put pressure on Kent Police to prioritise patrols in seaside areas to prevent anti-social behaviour.

3. **Listen to communities and stand firm against excessively large housing and solar farm developments:** When local residents complain about new housing or solar farm developments in their areas, it isn't out of inherent NIMBYism, it is because they know the impact such developments will have on their local community. Kent has taken a huge amount of new housing in recent years, driven by central government algorithms and targets, with no reference to local circumstances or character. Too much new housing is of poor design and without the necessary infrastructure to support a decent quality of life, and often filled by London Borough overspill rather than local Kent residents. Whilst recognising that people need homes, there is no point in building new homes that destroy existing local communities.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - Reduce London overspill into Kent
   - Ensure developers install vital infrastructure to support communities and community identity, rather than just bland dormitory estates
   - Work with local planning authorities to examine how more housing can be reserved for people with ties to the area.

4. **Improve the quality of roads and work to reduce delays from roadworks:** Nowhere is the decline in the civic realm more obvious than in the decline of our road infrastructure over recent years. Too many Kent residents' daily lives are blighted by potholes and endless roadworks, whilst the delay and unpredictability in travel times has a direct economic impact on many Kent businesses. We will reform Kent's roads by filling potholes, resurfacing roads and exploring every new and innovative technology that is available to improve the quality of our road assets across Kent. We will also lobby the government to reform the operation of the highways permit scheme to remove the ability of the utility companies to self-declaring road works as emergencies, which inhibits the ability of KCC as the Highways Authority to coordinate and manage works in a way that minimises the impact on residents and businesses.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will continue and expand investment in our roads through delivering a huge maintenance programme across Kent's roads.
- Empower our local highways staff who know their local roads to take the necessary action to improve the quality of roads that most impact local residents and communities.
- Lobby government for reform of the highways permit scheme to stop utility companies excessive use of the 'emergency works' provisions to avoid seeking permits from KCC as the highways authority to dig up the road.

5. Ensure that the infrastructure needs of the county to support economic growth and quality of life are fully in place: The scale of the growth Kent has faced over recent years has been unprecedented, which has placed significant pressure on the county's social and physical infrastructure. The failure to deliver 'infrastructure first' has not only materially harmed the quality of life, placing pressure on GPs, school and roads, but it has an economic impact on businesses who need certainty in terms staff availability, travel times and energy infrastructure to plan and invest for growth. We must break this cycle of insufficient infrastructure being delivered only after the pressure has become acute.

   Our priorities will be to:

   - Building on the Kent and Medway Infrastructure Framework, ensure the new Spatial Development Strategy fully captures Kent's strategic infrastructure needs and delivers a requirement into the planning system to deliver infrastructure first
   - Establish a Future Energy Forum which brings together all relevant parties to identify the Kent's future energy requirements and lobby the Government to take the action now to ensure those future energy needs are met.
   - Call on the Government to use the National Infrastructure Commission to undertake an independent assessment of the future infrastructure requirements on Kent given its importance of the Gateway to Europe and outline funding routes for this nationally critical infrastructure.

6. **Protect our Kent environment with practical, affordable and visible improvements:** Kent is a county of contrasts, from historic cities and market towns, to beautiful villages and countryside, our environment is often the key reason so many people want to live, work and visit our county. However, the traditional Kent landscape is increasingly under threat. Our traditional high streets risk becoming areas where people don't want to spend their time or money. Our roadside verges are increasingly covered in litter and debris which leaves the impression that the no agency is taking responsibility or delivering basic services. Our beaches and coastline have been under threat from sewage discharges. Whilst KCC may not always be the responsible body for

these issues, our strategic role in Kent calls on us to convene, work with and hold to account all partners to improve our environment.

Our priorities will be to:

- Tackle the blight of litter and debris left in Kent's roadside verges – irrespective of which agency is responsible – we need a joint action across all agencies.
- Lobby the government and regulator to take stronger action to stop waste discharge into the sea which harms our coastline and visitor economy.
- Work with partners to tackle criminal fly tipping and other environmental crime, which blights rural communities and is often linked to organised crime.
- Support the regeneration and economic vibrancy of our high streets, in particular supporting planning authorities in resisting more conversions of office accommodation into residential dwellings.