

Tenterden Division Report — August 2026

Cllr Wayne Chapman

Kent County Councillor for Tenterden: Appledore, Biddenden, High Halden, Kenardington, Newenden, Rolvenden, Rolvenden Layne, St Michaels, Stone-cum-Ebony and Wittersham

Local Government Reorganisation: the big story of the summer

Local Government Reorganisation will abolish the current two tier system of local government in Kent and Medway. Kent County Council, Medway Council and the twelve district and borough councils, including Ashford Borough Council, will be replaced by four brand new unitary councils, each responsible for delivering all council services in its area: education, social care, highways, waste, housing, planning and leisure. On 16 July the Secretary of State confirmed the Government's decision on the shape of those four councils: Option 4b.

Option 4b was not KCC's preferred option. The council had put forward a single Kent Council unitary, known as Option 1A, and Leader Linden Kemkaran has publicly criticised the decision, though she has confirmed KCC will now focus on delivering the transition. Under Option 4b the four new councils will be a North Kent unitary of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway, a West Kent unitary of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells, a Mid Kent unitary of Swale, Ashford and Folkestone and Hythe, and an East Kent unitary of Canterbury, Thanet and Dover.

What this means for the Tenterden Division. Ashford Borough, and therefore the whole of the Tenterden Division, will move into the new Mid Kent unitary council alongside Swale and Folkestone and Hythe. Council tax harmonisation, staffing, asset transfers, and the future of local access points such as Ashford Borough Council's presence at Highbury Hall in Tenterden are among the many practical details still to be worked through over the transition period.

It is worth setting out where things stand and what happens next. On 28 November 2025 Kent and Medway's fourteen councils submitted their full business case proposals to Government, with KCC's preferred submission being the single Kent Council option. Between 5 February and 26 March 2026 the Government ran a public consultation on all the submitted proposals, receiving around 3,000 responses. On 16 July 2026 the Secretary of State announced the decision in favour of Option 4b, and we are now in what is being called the foundational phase of transition. Over the coming months, Statutory Orders to formally establish the new councils are expected to be laid before Parliament, Kent and Medway's councils are jointly procuring a strategic partner to support the transition, and KCC and district councils are beginning detailed preparation on staffing, finance, systems and governance. Elections to the four new Shadow Authorities will follow on 6 May 2027, running in parallel with the existing councils to prepare for handover, before Vesting Day on 1 April 2028, when the four new unitary councils formally take over full responsibility for all local services and KCC, Medway Council and the twelve district and borough councils are abolished.

Importantly, nothing changes for residents in the meantime. KCC and Ashford Borough Council remain fully responsible for delivering all current services right through to Vesting Day. I will continue to report further detail as the Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee publishes its implementation timetable. Full background is available from

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/local-government-reorganisation-and-devolution>

KCC July Full Council

Full Council met on the same day, 16 July, with the LGR announcement landing partway through the meeting. The Leader confirmed to Members that the Council would take time to consider the detail while continuing to focus on services for residents. Members also debated four time limited motions: a Green Party motion on water resilience, which was carried with a Reform UK Group amendment 71 to 0; a Reform UK motion on the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty, carried 48 to 18 with 2 abstentions; a Restore Britain motion on solar developments, defeated 7 to 54 with 10 abstentions; and a Liberal Democrat motion on SEND transport, which was carried with a Reform UK Group amendment 70 to 0. Members also agreed to publish and submit the updated Kent Minerals Sites Plan for independent examination. You can read more in KCC's own account of the meeting, <https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/county-council-meets-to-discuss-key-issues-for-the-county>.

Water resilience: hosepipe ban and the Kent Water Resilience Partnership

South East Water's temporary use ban has been in force across its Kent supply area, including Tenterden and the surrounding villages, since 3 July, following record summer demand and low river and reservoir levels. Restrictions cover garden hoses, sprinklers, car washing and pool filling, though watering cans and drip irrigation remain permitted. Details and exemptions are on the <https://www.southeastwater.co.uk/about/updates/tubs-kent-faqs/>

Following the outages and supply failures earlier this year, KCC Leader Linden Kemkaran has set up the new Kent Water Resilience Partnership, which she chairs, bringing together water companies, local authorities and regulators to focus on long term planning, infrastructure investment and public accountability for water supply and quality across the county. As Chair of the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Scrutiny Committee, and having sat on the Short Focused Water Inquiry that recommended this approach, I am continuing to press for the Partnership to deliver real accountability, and for South East Water's promised network resilience investment to be delivered on schedule. You can read more about the plans <https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/kcc-leader-outlines-plans-for-greater-scrutiny-of-water-resilience-for-kent>

Roads and highways works across the division

A number of roadworks are affecting the division through August, so please plan ahead where you can. Appledore Road in Tenterden is closed from 3 to 19 August for UK Power Networks trench works to connect new streetlighting, and will close again from 20 to 30 August for resurfacing and drainage works between East Hill and Collison Place under Section 278 works funded by the developer.

KCC has confirmed it will carry out additional inspections of the works and the roughly eleven mile diversion route while working with the developer to minimise disruption to residents and businesses.

For more information <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/road-projects/in-progress-road-projects/appledore-road>

Swain Road in Tenterden was closed from 27 to 29 July for KCC drainage works, and the A262 Tenterden Road at Biddenden was closed over the same dates for a water pipe repair.

Full KCC roadworks advice can be found on the <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/what-we-look-after/roads/roadworks> with individual notices also available via <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/what-we-look-after/find-planned-work>

I continue to raise concerns with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport about how KCC assesses and prioritises carriageway defects across our rural lanes, building on the briefing I produced challenging the current 50mm pothole depth threshold. You can report a highway problem directly to KCC <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-or-track-a-problem-on-the-road-or-pavement>

Community and local news

The Spirit of Tenterden Festival ran successfully from 3 to 5 July, supported through my Members' Grant. Poundstretcher opened its first Tenterden store on 3 July, opened by Mayor Jane Mills and bringing up to twelve new jobs to the High Street. Tenterden's first ever Public Space Protection Order has been approved to help tackle antisocial behaviour in the town centre. Tenterden Schools Trust is exploring a takeover by a larger academy trust while a redundancy consultation continues at Homewood School, which I am following closely given the school's importance to the division. On a brighter note, Chapel Down, Tenterden's own winemaker, reported a rise in first half sales driven by US expansion, which is great news for the local economy, and the Kent and East Sussex Railway's Ready for Robertsbridge project to reconnect the heritage line to the national network by 2028 continues to make progress. Restoration works at Tenterden Town Hall are also progressing ahead of its planned summer reopening.

What's on across the division: looking ahead into August

In Tenterden, the Kent and East Sussex Railway is hosting a Vintage Bus Rally at Tenterden Town Station on 9 August, with free rides on some vintage buses to local destinations, followed by a Model Railway Exhibition at the station on 22 August. St Mildred's Church holds its Flower Festival from 29 to 31 August, the highlight of the August Bank Holiday weekend and held every two years, open Saturday 10am to 5pm, Sunday 12 to 5pm and Bank Holiday Monday 10am to 5pm, with the church tower open 1 to 4pm each day. Throughout August, Kent and East Sussex Railway steam and heritage diesel trains run between Tenterden and Bodiam Tuesday to Sunday and Bank Holidays, with the line also passing through Rolvenden and Wittersham stations. In Biddenden, Biddenden Tractorfest takes place at Holden Farm on Sissinghurst Road on 15 and 16 August, 10am to 5pm both days, with vintage tractors, farm machinery and family entertainment.

I was not able to find confirmed August listings this year for Appledore, High Halden, Kenardington, Newenden, Rolvenden, Rolvenden Layne, St Michaels, Stone-cum-Ebony or Wittersham beyond

regular parish and church activities. These smaller parishes' own newsletters, noticeboards and Facebook pages are usually the best source, alongside the <https://www.mytenterden.co.uk/> If your parish has something coming up you would like included next month, do let me know.

Council efficiency: DOLGE moves into its second phase

KCC has officially launched its strategy for the next phase of the Department, now Delivery, of Local Government Efficiency, known as DOLGE. Having spent its first year scrutinising the inherited budget to find savings, the second phase will be delivered across the whole authority, embedding a culture where staff are conscious of spend and aiming for a leaner, more effective council that delivers the best value for Kent taxpayers. Cabinet Member Chris Hespe has stressed this is not about wielding a chainsaw or a salami slicer but about finding sensible, pragmatic efficiencies. You can read more <https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/kcc-launches-dolge-strategy>

KCC general advice and support

UKHSA, the NHS and KCC's Director of Public Health are urging parents and carers to check their children have had both doses of the MMR vaccine, following nine new measles cases in Kent and Medway since 1 July. Just under 83% of five year olds locally have had both doses, which is above the national average but below the 95% needed to protect communities from outbreaks. Measles is highly infectious and spreads easily among the unvaccinated, and symptoms include cold-like symptoms, sore red eyes, a high temperature and a red-brown blotchy rash. It is never too late to catch up: contact your GP or a community immunisation clinic, which are running through July and August.

With the South East seeing repeated Heat-Health Alerts this summer, KCC's Director of Public Health is urging residents to be prepared, stay cool and keep hydrated, and to check in on vulnerable family, friends and neighbours, especially those living alone. Please take extra care with older people, young children, those who are ill or pregnant, and people with dementia, who may not notice they are overheating. Avoid strong sun in the middle of the day, use SPF 30 or higher sunscreen, and if you or anyone you know becomes unwell, call NHS 111, or 999 in an emergency.

On travel, children aged 15 and under can travel free on participating Kent bus operators throughout August, as part of the Government's Great British Summer Savings scheme. Kent residents in school years 7 to 11 can also apply for a KCC Travel Saver, and those aged 16 to 19 in education, training or an apprenticeship can apply for a KCC 16+ Travel Saver, each saving up to 50% on bus travel. Applications needed to be in by 9 August to guarantee a pass for the first day of the new school year in September, though later applications can still be made and may simply take up to four weeks to arrive.

On the cost of living, eligible Kent residents can apply for a one off Household Support Fund food shopping voucher, with applications open until 26 August or while funding lasts. KCC will never ask for bank details by phone, email or text, so please be alert to scams. A new government-funded Crisis and Resilience Fund, replacing the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments, is

due to launch in stages from this summer, offering short term crisis support and early money advice. KCC's wider cost of living hub also has guidance on benefits eligibility, energy costs, and help with bills, food, council tax and childcare.

On housing, KCC has launched the Kent Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund, backed by a £9.8 million government grant, to fund projects that reduce nutrient pollution in the Stodmarsh catchment. Nutrient Neutrality rules, in place since 2020 to protect the Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve near Canterbury, have delayed over 7,000 new homes across the affected districts, which include Ashford, and so parts of the Tenterden Division, as well as Canterbury, Folkestone and Hythe, Maidstone and Swale. The fund will support projects such as wetland creation and treatment works upgrades to unlock stalled housing sites. Further details on all of the above and more is available from the KCC Website <https://news.kent.gov.uk/>

Beginning of the end for Operation Brock

This summer's Operation Brock contraflow has been in place on the M20 coastbound between Junctions 8 at Maidstone and 9 at Ashford since mid-July, and is due to be lifted on 24 August, which will be welcome news for anyone in the division travelling that route. Longer term, KCC has now secured £20 million from the Department for Transport towards the Dover Border Access Improvement Project, which will reconfigure the Port of Dover's eastern docks to create space for the equivalent of more than 500 additional lorries to queue within the port itself. This is expected to cut the frequency and duration of Operation Brock and Dover TAP by up to 80% during normal operations, with reduced disruption anticipated along the whole M20 corridor through Folkestone and Ashford as far as Maidstone, a genuine benefit for Tenterden Division residents who rely on that route. You can read more <https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/beginning-of-the-end-for-operation-brock-as-kcc-secures-20-million-for-dover-access-improvements>

Get in touch

As always, if you have a local issue please in the first instance report via the KCC portal and for all other issues please send me an email

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-or-track-a-problem-on-the-road-or-pavement>

email: wayne.chapman@kent.gov.uk