

# Tenterden Division Report — October 2026

## Cllr Wayne Chapman

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

### Local Government Reorganisation: paused

As many of you will have seen from my separate update sheet, on 7 September the Government announced that Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway has been paused pending a review. The decision followed updated legal advice received by ministers, and Kent is one of fourteen areas across the country whose July decisions have now been placed under review. Surrey is unaffected and will still move to two new unitary councils in April 2027.

In practical terms this means the plan announced in July, which would have abolished Kent County Council, Medway Council and all twelve district and borough councils and replaced them with four new unitaries, is on hold. The Mid Kent unitary that would have taken in our division alongside Swale and Folkestone and Hythe is no longer going ahead on the timetable we were given, and nobody yet knows whether reorganisation will return, in what form, or when.

The most immediate effect is on next May. The Government has confirmed the May 2027 local elections will go ahead on existing council boundaries, so there will be no shadow unitary elections. Instead Ashford Borough Council elections will take place as normal. Town and parish councils are not affected by any of this, and every service you receive from KCC and from Ashford Borough Council carries on exactly as before.

KCC's position has been clear throughout. Our Leader, Linden Kemkaran, wrote to the Secretary of State asking for a proper explanation of the reasoning behind July's decision, and she has told Full Council she will keep writing to Government to get clarity for residents and for the staff who have spent months on this work. Council leaders across the county are now seeking answers on what happens next, and the Government has said more will follow in its Rewiring the State White Paper. KCC's statement and the Leader's video message are available from <https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/kent-county-councils-statement-in-response-to-the-decision-around-local-government-reorganisation>

### KCC September Full Council

Full Council met at Sessions House in Maidstone on Thursday 17 September. The day began with a special meeting at which Members voted to award the Freedom of the County of Kent to the Brigade of Gurkhas. The motion was proposed by our Leader and won cross-party support. It recognises more than two centuries of loyal service, and Kent's close ties with the Royal Gurkha Rifles at Shorncliffe in Folkestone and the Queen's Gurkha Engineers in Maidstone. It was a proud moment for the Chamber.

The main meeting then considered changes to the Planning Applications Committee's terms of reference required by Government, the Treasury Management year end report on the council's financial resources, and an update on the council's committees. In her Leader's report, Linden Kemkaran updated Members on her continuing engagement with the new leadership at South East Water, on our work to get the best value from every pound KCC spends, and on LGR.

## **Water resilience and South East Water**

August's outages, which left homes in Rolvenden and neighbouring villages without water for days, are still fresh in people's minds. Since then South East Water has continued to change at the top. John Halsall took over as Chief Executive in July, a new Customer Services Director started the same month, and a new Chief Corporate Affairs Officer joined the executive team in September. The company says it is running a major transformation programme focused on network resilience and customer service.

New faces are welcome, but residents will judge South East Water on whether the taps keep running, not on appointments. Through the Kent Water Resilience Partnership, and as Chair of KCC's Flood Risk and Water Management Scrutiny Committee, I will keep pressing the company for real investment and honest communication with our villages. With autumn rain on the way, it is also a good time to check your property is signed up for Environment Agency flood warnings and to report any blocked highway drains through the KCC portal. South East Water's own updates are available from <https://www.southeastwater.co.uk/about/updates/news/>

## **Roads and highways across the division**

Colonel Stephens Greenway, Tenterden. The £150,000 resurfacing of Tenterden's only traffic-free cycle and walking route between St Michaels and the town centre, funded through the Department for Transport's Active Travel Fund, is due to start in October and will take around four weeks. Ringway will resurface 650 metres of the route as a three metre wide shared path for walking, wheeling and cycling, with new fencing where there are safety risks. The Greenway will be closed while the work is done, with walkers and cyclists diverted through the nearby estate roads. Specialist environmental advice will be followed throughout to protect the route's wildlife.

Smallhythe Road, Tenterden. Repairs programmed for October and November.

Appledore Road, Tenterden. The main resurfacing between East Hill and Collison Place was completed at the end of August/September, together with the new street lighting, crossing improvements and traffic calming, there are further remedial works needing to be completed by contractors. I know the month long closure was very hard on some local businesses, and I thank everyone for their patience.

Reading Street Hill, Tenterden. A full depth repair and resurfacing of the dip halfway down the hill has been completed.

Newenden Bridge, A28. The bridge remains open. The planned maintenance closure is still scheduled for June to September 2027, and I will make sure businesses and residents on both sides of the river get plenty of notice.

As the clocks go back on Sunday 25 October and the evenings draw in, please report faulty street lights, potholes and blocked drains as soon as you spot them. The KCC portal is available from <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem>

## **Community and local news**

Residents in Tenterden have raised real concerns about Ashford Borough Council's proposal to bring in a £2 overnight charge in the town's three main car parks. People have pointed to the lack of evening buses and the risk of cars simply moving into residential side streets. The borough council's cabinet is expected to look at parking charges again on 8 October, and I would encourage anyone with a view to make it known to their borough councillors before then, I have personally signed the petition opposing to these changes.

KCC's Registration Service has received an application for Tenterden Town Hall, 24 High Street, to become approved premises for civil marriages and civil partnerships. The County Council can only consider whether a venue is seemly and dignified, regularly available for ceremonies, safe with acceptable fire precautions, free of any religious connection that would conflict with civil ceremonies, and has clearly identifiable rooms for their use. I have given the application my full support. Following its refurbishment, the Town Hall is a building Tenterden can be proud of, and I look forward to seeing it used to its full potential for residents, with couples able to marry at the heart of our town.

Between Biddenden and St Michaels, the Hukins family at Haffenden Farm, who have grown hops there for more than 120 years of which my family used to work in the Hukins family hop gardens. They are creating a 170 acre habitat bank. Around 80 per cent of the site will be restored to meadows, native hedgerows, orchards and river habitat, funded through developer biodiversity contributions approved by Ashford Borough Council. It is a fine example of local farming families leading the way on nature.

In Biddenden, All Saints Church, which has stood at the heart of the village for more than 700 years, is fundraising for urgent structural repairs. Anyone able to help can find details through the church and the parish magazine.

Homewood School has launched a new partnership with Plumpton College, bringing land based and practical learning opportunities to local young people, and the school is holding open morning tours for families this autumn.

Kent and East Sussex Railway has been named Best Family Experience in Kent for the second year running, congratulations and well done to all at K&ESR.

September was a busy month for culture too. The Appledore Book Festival ran for ten days from 18 September with support from the People's Postcode Lottery, Horne's Place Chapel in Appledore opened its doors for Heritage Open Days, and Chapel Down held its first Magnum Festival at the winery on Smallhythe Road. Well done to all the volunteers and organisers involved.

## **What's on across the division**

Saturday 3 October brings an all day folk song and music session at The Tenterden Club on the High Street, running from late morning until 10.30pm and free to attend, keeping the spirit of the Tenterden Folk Festival alive.

Over October half term the Kent and East Sussex Railway runs its Halloween programme from Tenterden Town Station. The Spellbound Express on 28, 29 and 30 October is aimed at children aged four to eleven, with a wicked witch, magic tricks and a friendly baby dragon on board. The Fright Night Express follows on 30 and 31 October, with drummers, a fire eater and fireworks at Northiam, weather permitting. The railway is also offering behind the scenes autumn experiences at Tenterden and Rolvenden, and this is the last operating period before Santa Specials begin on 29 November.

Looking further ahead, the Tenterden Christmas Market is on Thursday 19 November on the High Street and Tenterden Green.

If your parish, church, hall or club has something coming up, please email me and I will make sure it features next month.

### **SEND services: inspection outcome**

In September Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission published their latest inspection of special educational needs and disabilities services in Kent. Kent received the middle of the three possible outcomes. Inspectors found real improvement, including better quality new Education, Health and Care Plans, more inclusive support in schools, stronger partnership working and earlier help for some children. They also found that experiences are still inconsistent across the county, with delays in some services and communication with families not always good enough.

This is the first time in many years that KCC is no longer judged to be systemically failing children and families with SEND, which is a significant step. But we know many parents in our villages have not yet felt that progress, and the job now is to make sure every family gets the same standard of support wherever they live. The full KCC statement is available from <https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/kent-agrees-with-send-inspection-findings-and-commits-to-further-improvements-for-children-and-families>

### **KCC general advice and support**

Stoptober. October is the national month to quit smoking. Stopping for 28 days makes you five times more likely to quit for good, and KCC's free stop smoking services, including the One You Kent shop in Ashford, offer friendly advice and access to quit aids. An average smoker can save as much as £3,700 a year.

Know your numbers. Around a third of people have high or low blood pressure without knowing it. Many pharmacies offer free blood pressure checks, and if you are aged 40 to 74 without an existing condition, please take up your free NHS Health Check when your GP invites you.

Measles and MMR. With children back at school, KCC is urging parents to check their children have had both doses of the MMR vaccine. It is never too late to catch up, so please speak to your GP surgery if you are unsure.

Help with the cost of living. As the heating season begins, the Crisis and Resilience Fund offers short term help for households facing hardship, and KCC's cost of living pages bring together advice on benefits, energy bills, food and council tax. For those of you in our many off grid rural homes on oil or LPG who are thinking about a heat pump, the Government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme is seeing record demand, so book a survey with an accredited installer early.

Further information on all of these is available from the KCC Website <https://news.kent.gov.uk/>

### **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-a-problem>

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