

KCC Councillor Wayne Chapman / Reform UK

Annual Parish Meeting Report – April 2026

(Covering Appledore, Biddenden, Rolvenden, Rolvenden Layne, St Michaels, Tenterden, Wittersham, Kenardington, Newenden, High Halden, and Stone-cum-Ebony)

First Year in Office — 2025/26

Opening

Chair, members of the council, and residents — thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening, and for the warm welcome I have received across the division throughout this first year.

When I stood for election as your Kent County Councillor, I made a simple promise, to listen, and to make sure that the communities I serve — from Tenterden and Biddenden, to Rolvenden and Wittersham, Appledore, High Halden, Newenden, Kenardington and Stone-cum-Ebony — would have a voice at County Hall that was not just present, but active. I hope I have begun to deliver on that promise.

My First Year

This past year has been one of learning, engagement, and — I won't pretend otherwise — more than a few steep learning curves. County Council is a complex place. The budgets are significant, the decisions far-reaching, and the machinery of local government does not always move at the pace we would like.

From my first months in post, I have been immersed in the issues that matter most to you. Highways — the state of our roads, the frustration of potholes and delayed repairs — remains at the top of almost every conversation I have. I have been raising cases, pushing for accountability, and working hard to ensure our rural roads are not treated as an afterthought.

I have engaged with KCC's SEND provision, the pressures on our schools, the ongoing debate around Local Government Reorganisation and what a future unitary authority might mean for how our area is governed. I have been involved in scrutiny of major spending decisions, and I have taken seriously my responsibility to represent you — not just in the chamber, but in writing, in meetings, and at your doors.

Keeping You Informed

I want to be transparent with you about something. Representing nine communities across a large rural division, whilst also fulfilling my duties at County Hall — committees, cabinet scrutiny, full council, and the many demands that come with being part of a ruling administration — means that I am not always able to attend every meeting in person. Where that is the case, I always ensure my apologies are submitted in advance, and I maintain a monthly Councillor Report that is circulated to every parish and town council across the division.

That report is my commitment to keeping you informed — covering highways updates, KCC decisions, local issues, and anything else relevant to your community — whether I am in the room or not. If you have something you would like included, or a question you would like answered, my door is always open.

What Reform UK Has Delivered at County Hall

I said earlier that Reform UK's arrival as the ruling administration has brought a genuine change in approach. I want to give you some concrete evidence of that, because I think you deserve to know what is being achieved in your name at County Hall.

On your finances: in our first year we reduced KCC's debt by £114 million — saving £3,362 every single day in interest payments. We made £39.5 million in savings in future spending by Rescinding The Climate Emergency In Kent. All while setting a budget with no extra borrowing, a net increase in reserves, and increased investment in Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Highways and Transport.

Disappointedly, central government's "fair funding" did not keep up with the growth in both demand and costs for adult social care and children services,

Our Council Tax increase was lower than 86% of comparable councils across England.

On your roads: we spent a record amount on road repairs and filled a record amount of potholes. That is real, visible action — and I know from conversations across this division just how much that matters to people living in rural Kent.

On your services: I am proud to say that every single library threatened with closure under the previous Conservative administration has been saved. All of them. Country Parks, Community Wardens and School Crossing Staff have equally been protected. These are not small things — they are the fabric of community life, and they were under genuine threat before Reform UK took control.

On education: 98% of Early Years settings in Kent are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, and 96% of pupils secured a place at one of their preferred schools.

On business: we have produced Kent's first ever Commercial Strategy, directed £55 million more in contracts to Kent companies, and provided enhanced support to 500 local supplier businesses.

And the scale of what KCC delivers day to day is worth pausing on. In the past year alone: an increase with more potholes filled, more drainage gullies cleared, 250,000+ pupils supported in our schools, 48,000+ children with SEND receiving support, 2.7 million library visits, and 19,000+ adults supported through care homes and home help. This county is a vast and complex operation — and it is being run better than it was.

Working Together

None of this work happens in isolation. It depends on the partnership between county, district, and parish level — and I want to say how much I value the dedication of every councillor and clerk in this room. You are the backbone of democracy at its most local, and most human level. The issues you raise, the residents you represent, and the persistence you bring to your communities directly informs the work I do on your behalf at County Hall.

Looking Ahead

As I head into my second year, I carry with me everything I have learned from you. The priorities are clear: better infrastructure, stronger communities, tighter value for money, and a County Council that genuinely puts Kent's residents first. Reform UK came into County Hall with a promise to do things differently. I believe we are delivering on that — and I intend to keep making the case for this division, for these communities, and for the people who live and work here. Thank you for your trust. I look forward to continuing to work alongside you.