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FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 3 April 2024

Present: Councillors Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Mike Blakemore, Polly Blakemore, James Butcher, Bridget Chapman, Tony Cooper, Laura Davison, Gary Fuller, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Anthony Hills, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Anita Jones, Nicola Keen, Adrian Lockwood, Alan Martin, Elaine Martin, Jim Martin, Liz McShane, Jackie Meade, Tim Prater, Stephen Scoffham, Rebecca Shoob, Jeremy Speakman, Paul Thomas, Belinda Walker, David Wimble and John Wing

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Rich Holgate and Connor McConville

At the commencement of the meeting, a two minutes silence was held in recognition of the public service given by former district councillor Michael Lyons following a short statement by the Chair of the Council.

91. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Hills and Meade both made declarations in respect of their roles as Councillors for Kent County Council.

92. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2024 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chair.

93. **Chair's Communications**

The Chair of the Council gave the following communications:

“As a feminist March is a very important time of the year for me as it included IWD or as I like to call it international Womens Month, it is coincidentally, if you didn't already know women's history month as well. I started my month long celebrations by honouring an invitation sent out by the Mayoress of New Romney. What a great night! Thank you Carly Bryant – Chair master for a brilliant speech and the joy you helped to evoke with our sing-along to Jon Bon Jovi – such fun. I caught the music bug for the rest of the evening and could not stop smiling. As the song says "girls just wanna have fun". A dose of singing is a great prescription for many ailments especially in regards to mental health.

I then went on to Sevenoaks for the second IWN event this time by invitation of the Mayoress of, you've guessed it, Sevenoaks. I thought I knew a lot about the Suffragettes but Jenny Godfrey our speaker is a true enthusiast and die-hard fan. I was absolutely blown away by what these amazing women did locally, within Kent, as well as nationally to get us our right to vote.

I volunteered at the recent Take up Space festival run by Folkestone Women's Forum. and joined in with the amazing, freeing and therapeutic dancing for all ages offered by Moving Memory CIC.

I marvelled at the procession led by the Mayor of Folkestone – Cllr Belinda Walker that brought in the mother bread baked by a community of women across all demographics. The Cheriton Nepalese community also held their own event to pay homage to the sisters, daughters, mothers, grandmothers and friends of the community and I felt honoured to open an exhibition of beautiful photographs taken by my minister Anita McKenzie. In addition, I returned a week or two later for the Holi celebrations. I went prepared wore white and covered my hair. I was therefore rightfully seen as a blank canvas and spent most of the event being splattered with various vibrant shades of blues, yellows, reds.. One particular child thought pink was a good colour on me and proceeded to pummel my face with it. I got powder in my mouth eyes and ears. I have never looked so colourful in my whole life! Sadly, I had to leave early to have sufficient time to remove all of the beautiful colour before proceeding to the Mayor of Canterbury Spring ball that evening; because unfortunately, although I thought I looked great I don't think my Holi outfit was suitable attire for a formal ball.

I have attended many events and supported many charities over the months and still have many to come in what will be a jam-packed month. This will be the last council meeting that I chair, I had my official photo taken just before I entered and my tenure is now solidified and permanently linked to this district and it's people. As a Christian I know that there is a season for everything, I have enjoyed a good harvest. This is the end of one journey but the beginning of another as I take on my role as Mayor of Folkestone on the 7th of May. We have just celebrated Easter and I hold on to the powerful reminder that no matter how challenging or difficult life may be, there is always the potential for new beginnings, transformation, and renewal. I embrace change, embrace the possibilities of the future and I hope you can too“.

94. **Petitions**

There were no petitions.

95. **Questions from the Public**

The questions asked, including supplementary questions, and the answers given are set out in Schedule 1, appended to these minutes.

96. **Questions from Councillors**

The questions asked, including supplementary questions, and the answers given are set out in Schedule 2, appended to these minutes.

97. **Announcements of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader gave the following announcements:

“Good evening Members, I hope you all had a relaxing, if not wet Easter.

1. I have been chairing the committee considering the applications for Green Business Grants along with officers, the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Bio Diversity and Ward Councillors. I have been very impressed with the range and diversity of the applications. The scheme has now closed to new applications and I am delighted to tell the Council that, following the next round of grant panels, all of the Green Business Grants funding will have been allocated. This will have a significant positive impact on the reduction of Carbon produced by businesses in the District.
2. I have also been chairing the committee considering applications under the Rural Prosperity Fund along with officers and Ward councillors. Again I have been delighted with the range and diversity of the proposals. I realise in this chamber, many members represent urban wards where the majority of our resident live, but, geographically we are a rural District and the prosperity of rural areas must be supported where possible. I note the involvement of ward members.
3. The leaders of the four political groups and Independent Councillor Paul Thomas have been meeting regularly as we move towards a committee system. There is a significant update for members planned this month, although no date has been agreed yet.
4. I am pleased to announce that work will begin this month on our new corporate plan and to support this I will be establishing a Corporate Plan Working Group, which will include all parties. I am also committed to ensuring that all Councillors will have the opportunity to work together and contribute to the strategic direction for the Council through the new plan.
5. I have attended many meetings regarding Otterpool Park with government agencies, and developers, these discussions have been positive and will continue.
6. I was delighted to attend my first meeting of BOSCO, our joint initiative with our neighbour across the Channel Boulogne. BOSCO has suffered somewhat in recent years because of Covid etc, there has been a concerted effort on both sides of the Channel to meet once again. We have so much in common with our neighbours, I am delighted that our cross channel relationship has been renewed.

7. I attended meetings in my role as Armed Forces Champion.
8. I have been visiting businesses in the District as usual including weavers, healthcare providers, hotels, hospitality and Chartered Surveyors. Business holds some very interesting perspectives on the future of the District. This Council is a friend to good business.
9. Princes Parade hoarding: I am delighted to announce that the hoarding surrounding the Princes Parade site is being dismantled.
10. My regular contact with Stagecoach continues. I was delighted to attend the first meeting of the Folkestone Bus Users group along with Councillor Davison, Councillor Blakemore and the Mayor of Folkestone Councillor Walker. A great community response to a community problem that the Council is proud to be part of.
11. I have been in regular contact with Southern Water and held meetings with them, including one at New Romney Sewage works. These meetings concern the sewage on the Copperfield's Estate in Lydd, the flooding on Udan Rd and Beverley Gardens in Dymchurch and the impact the use of tankers is having, moving sewage from Newington and Peene to Range Rd in Hythe. I have further meetings with Southern Water, the Environment Agency and KCC Councillors planned this month.
12. Along with many coastal District Councils I continue to attend a monthly meeting organised by the Environment Agency to collectively express our shared concern about Southern Water's consistent failure to meet the needs of their customers.
13. I have attended the Kent Leaders Forum to discuss the issues which affect the Council's in Kent. I have also attended meetings of the East Kent Leaders forum which has a more focused view of the issues affecting the East Kent Districts.
14. I have held meetings with local charities and agencies including Dementia Awareness, Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds, local Business Groups and local Community Groups.
15. I was very pleased to be invited to the launch of Music in May by Folkestone Music Town. This year's programme of events and workshops is larger than ever and covers almost all genres of music from rock to classical and choral to busking!
16. I attended a conference of District Council Leaders and Chief Executives to discuss common problems and seek common solutions.

17. I was delighted to attend an absolutely fantastic exhibition at the Folkestone Art Gallery of Pop and Punk Art, it was brilliant to see so many of my old album covers that have become works of art! There are many who can speak more eloquently than I about the importance of art and the creative sector in the future of Folkestone, but a single visit to this exhibition put me and my own cultural history at the centre of another outstanding example of the town's creative regeneration
18. In terms of the beginning of work starting on the Corporate Plan, this is vitally important work and I welcome the views of all Councillors and members of the public”.

Councillor Davison, Deputy Leader of the Labour Group then responded to the announcements. She wished Councillor McConville a speedy recovery and stated that she hoped everyone was enjoying the Easter holidays, despite the weather. She stated it had been nice to attend Easter events in her ward, from egg rolling on the old high street which was good fun, Councillor Walker and her had attended a BBQ and bouncy council in Broadmead, which was very lively, with lots of children. She had also been to other events, including a sewage protest.

She stated, in response to the Leader's comments around the buses, this work showed the extent of the work going on across the district from individuals who were putting huge amounts of effort into bringing things to life in our spaces, and she had no doubt that this had had an impact on making Folkestone the South East's best place to live. Individuals in her ward had worked hard to make this happen and thanks was owed to them. She added that it was good to see the changing places toilet had opened in the Coastal parks, with more yet to open, ensuring accessible toilets. She also stated that it was good to see the toilet had been twinned, which she had raised as something she would like to happen when she was first elected as a Councillor. She stated that Councillor Martin had mentioned about the Corporate Plan, and the group looked forward to engaging with that piece of work. She then added a thank you to the Chair for her invigorating chairing of Council over the last year.

Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee also responded to the announcements, and advised she had also been involved in a number of events over Easter, and the children seemed to be enjoying themselves, when it was not raining. She was pleased to hear about the Rural Prosperity Fund and stated that she had been part of the previous cabinet who had set the criteria and it was important that the rural community had support to help with the energy cuts. She gave apologies for missing the meeting, but two applications in her ward had been agreed, which she was pleased about. She was happy to be part of the Corporate Plan Working Group and also looked forward to positive news on Otterpool Park, as she was keen to know more detail on what was happening. She was delighted about the Bosco event being started up, and felt it was an important event. She

asked if the Tall Ships Project could also be brought back to the district, as it did a lot for tourism in Folkestone. On the Princes Parade consultation, she was pleased it would be an open consultation, but asked that it include the whole district and not just local people to Hythe. She welcomed the conversations with Stagecoach, Southern Water and the Environment Agency and she would also welcome a report showing the successes achieved from these conversations. She welcomed the news about Folkestone music town and added that anything relating to culture was a good thing.

The Leader of the Council was then given an opportunity to sum up and advised that in respect of Tall Ships, Boulogne had so much on with the Tour de France, Paris Olympics and Olympic Torch arrival, that they felt it would be too much to commit to the Tall Ships event. Leading on from this, he then referred to the Geopark, which he stated was an interesting strategic direction, linking us to Boulogne, which we were keen to pursue, as were Eurotunnel and Boulogne and that he hoped the Tall Ships event would return.

He concluded by thanking the Chair for the excellent way she had chaired meetings, and although she described herself as slightly bossy, he found the rigor that she brought to the meetings refreshing.

Proposed by Councillor J Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Prater; and

RESOLVED:

That the announcements of the Leader of the Council be noted.

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

98. Portfolio Holder reports to Council

The Portfolio Holder updates had been circulated within the agenda pack and noted by Members.

99. Opposition Business

Councillor Davison on behalf of the Labour Group presented the opposition business which called for the drafting of a Culture, Heritage and Tourism Strategy.

Proposed by Councillor Davison,
Seconded by Councillor Lockwood; and

RESOLVED:

That Option (b) (refer the issue to Cabinet or the relevant overview and scrutiny committee, as the case may be for their observations before deciding whether to make a decision on the issue) be applied to the business below:

As part of the Corporate Plan refresh being undertaken, to continue ongoing work to produce strategies which are inclusive to Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

To conduct meaningful consultation with members, community organisations, residents and businesses to assist in the production of council strategies which are inclusive of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

Should a Culture, Heritage and Tourism Strategy be drafted, it be adopted by full council as the overarching authorising body of this council.

(Voting figures: 28 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

100. Motions on Notice

There were no motions on notice.

101. Voluntary Redundancy

The report provided information relating to the voluntary redundancy of employee 14290.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor J Martin; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/23/27 be received and noted.**
- 2. That it be noted that the redundancy and associated costs for employee 14290 were agreed and paid from the Transformation Fund, as set out in the council report A/23/15 included in the 23/24 budget.**

(Voting figures: 28 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

102. Annual Pay Policy Statement 2024/25

The report considered the recommendation from the Personnel Committee and presented the pay policy statement for 2024/25 for approval.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor J Martin; and

RESOLVED:

1. **That report A/23/28 be received and noted.**
2. **That under S38(1) Localism Act 2011 the updated Pay Policy Statement appended to the report for 2024/25 be approved.**

(Voting figures: 28 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

103. **Committee Membership changes**

The report advised on changes to the political balance of Folkestone and Hythe District Council following the by-election at Romney Marsh on 22 February 2024 and election of Councillor Tony Hills. Under the Folkestone and Hythe District Council Constitution, Part 8.1 'Delegation to Officers', paragraph 3.16, the Head of Paid Service is authorised to make appointments to committees or sub-committees at the request of the relevant political group leader. This report sets out the appointments made, under these powers, at the request of the political group leaders, since the last Council meeting.

Proposed by Councillor J Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Prater; and

RESOLVED:

That report A/23/26 be received and noted.

(Voting figures: 28 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

Council – 3 April 2024

Public Questions and answers:

1. **From Ms Kate Arnold to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Otterpool Park**

On behalf of all Newington and Peene residents, I would like some clear and concise answers regarding a seriously disruptive issue taking place within 'The Street', Newington, Folkestone. Can the Leader tell us when the 24 hour/day Sewage Tankers will stop driving through Newington Village and why we have had to endure it for 4 months now?

THE MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC WAS NOT PRESENT AT THE MEETING, AND THEREFORE THE QUESTION WAS NOT ANSWERED. HOWEVER, THE WRITTEN RESPONSE BELOW WAS PROVIDED.

ANSWER:

Thank you, Ms Arnold for your question.

Let me start by saying that this Council has no authority, control or influence on Southern Water, we can only advocate on behalf of our residents, their customers. I have many issues with Southern Water's performance, I recently signed a letter addressed to OFWAT the water regulator, along with many other Councils, asking OFWAT to take legal action against Southern Water because of their consistent failure to meet their customer's needs. Last year OFWAT fined Southern Water £91M for similar failures.

With regard to your specific question, I wrote to Southern Water, who have given a detailed response to your question. Rather than read it in full, I will summarise the main points and I will ask our Committee Services Team to include Southern Water's full response in the minutes. If you are happy to leave your email address with the Clerk, I am happy to write to you including my correspondence with Southern Water.

Southern Water respond that the tanker movements through the village are to transport excessive groundwater that is finding its way into the local sewer network in Newington and Peene.

Southern Water report that the local sewer network is over 60 years old and needs extensive relining works, which is why ground water is infiltrating into the sewers. The heavy rainfall experienced over recent months has only added to the problem and increased the need to pump the excess water into tankers and transport it through the village to be disposed of elsewhere.

Southern Water confirm that the tankers are taking the wastewater to the Range Road Wastewater Pumping Station (WPS) in Hythe.

Southern Water go on to state that whilst survey works are planned for the local sewers as first stage; the full relining works to the sewers will take, and I quote, 'considerable time' and no clear date is given when this work will start or finish. There is also the increased strain on the Range Road Pumping Station from the increased transported wastewater.

At the other end of the tanker journey, the people who live in St Leonard's Rd in Hythe, are being kept awake at night with many tankers loaded with sewage driving down this narrow residential street on route to the Range Rd pumping station.

I would like to thank Southern Water for responding promptly to the question. The candour in their response is appreciated, if not welcome. However, and not for the first time, we find our local community bearing the brunt of years of under investment in the water infrastructure. The council will continue to advocate and make the case for greater investment from Southern Water to resolve the local flooding pressures as well as the urgent turnaround needed in bathing water quality along our coast.

THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION WAS ALSO PROVIDED:

Response received from Southern Water on 28/3/24.

What is the reason?

The issue in Newington is groundwater infiltration, due to the extreme levels of rain in recent months. The pipes have not become faulty recently, but the way they were laid 60+ years ago means groundwater is finding its way in the sewer network.

Specifically in Newington, there is lots of sewer relining work planned which will help reduce groundwater. Surveys are planned to take place to determine the worst areas for infiltration in the area, but it will take a considerable amount of time to reline all of the affected areas. Therefore we have to prioritise the worst affected and do what we can to reduce the impact.

The groundwater issues are weather related and using last week as an example, we didn't need tanker movements due to the dry period. However, tankers will be required during periods of wet weather.

Where are they coming from and going to?

The tankers are specifically coming from Newington and Peene, where we are experiencing the groundwater issues.

They are going to Range Road Wastewater Pumping Station (WPS), which is a treatment station and is permitted to take wastewater flows from within the catchment. All tanker movement taken to Range Road are coming from the local area.

How long will this continue?

Unfortunately, we are unable to put a timescale on how long these tanker movements will be required for currently due to the extreme amount of rain we've had in recent months.

We require a consistent period of warmer dry weather, which will help dry out the ground and lower groundwater levels.

Range Road WPS

Separately to the Newington query, I wanted to confirm that tanker movements being taken to Range Road WPS are coming from either Newington or Duck Street. Both of these areas are from within the catchment which would naturally pump to the site anyway. We cannot and will not take flows out of a particular catchment to a different site. Therefore, Range Road is not receiving tankers from the wider area.

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Council – 3 April 2024

Councillor Questions and answers:

1. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

With the current financial constraints on the council could you please tell us how much money it cost the council so ultimately the tax payer can put up a defence of the judicial review and enquiries surrounding princes parade to include officer time, legal services and external costs for a barrister and legal team alongside expert reports etc?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Wimble. I can confirm that the total cost for the council associated with the judicial review was £288,211.32.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

As the council won the JR do you think it should take every step possible to recover ALL the money from the team that lost as it is allowed to do under U.K. law? As this was public money and the council were totally vindicated of ANY WRONGDOING. it must be something to consider as it would equate to many tens if not hundreds of thousands of pounds. I am conscious that a time limit of 5 years dictates the appeal for costs.

ANSWER:

I am able to tell Councillor Wimble that the Council recovered all of their allowable Judicial Review costs under the AAHUS convention which allows people access to environmental justice.

2. From Councillor Tony Hills to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

At a recent meeting of the Council, the council meeting agreed to support sustainable energy production in the district.

With the green area at Princes Parade now lying fallow. I wondered could it be used as a location for a wind farm to supply electricity to Hythe and the district?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Hills, I clearly detect an element of the "tongue in cheek" in your question - no harm in that! The site is too small and not deep enough, there are also too many houses nearby, the Conservative government have effectively blocked all land-based wind farms for many years and the site poses it's own individual risks. All that said, there is a serious element to your question which I am grateful to you, for giving me the

opportunity to promote the consultation we will be holding before the end of this year regarding the future of Prince's Parade.

We will be asking local people what they want the site to be: an open space, a residential development, a park or indeed a wind farm! All suggestions will be welcomed! The point I want to stress is; this will be a genuine consultation where we, the Council, will be asking people for their ideas, suggestions and ambitions for the site. We will not be filling the room with expensive consultants trying to tell people what they want, we will be starting with a blank sheet of paper and taking people's views. If at that time Councillor Hills, you want to come along and suggest a wind farm for the site I will ensure it is recorded.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Would the Leader consider setting up a cross party Working Group to consider this?

ANSWER:

This is an excellent suggestion, but it was important to let local people have their say in the consultation first, and this could be considered at an appropriate time afterwards.

3. From Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee to ~~Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and the District Economy~~ In Cllr Holgate's absence, Cllr J Martin will read the response.

What an accolade for our Town to be crowned the best place to live in the south east of England by the Sunday Times. The judges talk about our "eye-catching culture-led regeneration". They praised our "artists' studios, the cool shops on the Old High Street and the Harbour Arm. The judges also noted the town's "impressive schools, state-of-the-art sports facilities and high-speed trains to London".

What is the current Administration doing to maximise this opportunity?

ANSWER:

Thank you, Cllr Hollingsbee, for your question. I think we all agree Folkestone is a fantastic place to live, work and play, this accolade has been welcomed, and will in its own right, raise the profile of the area. Accolades such as this have also been used in our recruitment content to help the council stand out in a competitive market and encourage candidates to embrace the idea of relocating.

Tourism plays a key part of my portfolio and work has started on developing a visitor economy strategy which is in the very early stages of development. Our strategy will capitalise on this type of positive press coverage to draw more visitors into the district which will help support the local economy. This work is

happening in tandem with the regeneration programme that is gaining momentum now, as we enter into the detailed design and tendering phase, the recently posted fly through YouTube video of the FABF scheme has had over 4500 views which is a really high number and probably can be linked to the Sunday Times article, so all very timely. This amplification will not only help the visitor economy but also inward investment, where new companies seek not just the usual attributes of an area, such as skills, transport links, supply chains etc but also the culture and lifestyle of the area as this will help retain their employees. So being named as a great location all helps the overall agenda.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

4. From Councillor A Martin to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

I understand that the Kent Wildlife Trust is terminating its lease for the Romney Marsh Visitor Centre. What are the councils plans for the site once this ends?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Martin. Kent Wildlife Trust are surrendering their lease at the Romney Marsh Visitor Centre, officers have already engaged with KWT as part of the surrendering lease process. FHDC are now assessing the site and liaising with key stakeholders to fully understand the current site operations and constraints and will update members on any future plans as they develop over the coming months.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can we ensure the involvement of Romney Marsh Councillors in the review, in order to champion local businesses, which as Romney Tweed?

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