

Full Council – 20 February 2019

Councillor questions:

1. **From Councillor Mrs Jeffrey to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for the Environment**

Can you provide an update on how this administration is improving the appearance of the district through the use of targeted resources?

ANSWER:

I am happy to respond to Cllr Mrs Jeffrey's question.

As the cabinet member responsible for both the waste and street cleansing service and the environmental enforcement service, I can confirm the council's commitment to Appearance Matters is at the heart of everything we do. Resources do need to be targeted and the street cleansing and environmental services have needed to respond to the steady and welcome growth of visitors and residents to the district.

Examples of how resources have been targeted to improve the appearance of the district include:

In terms of street cleansing we started the council year by reviewing our seasonal plans. This resulted in more resources being allocated to street cleansing particularly over the bank holiday weekends. More temporary bulk bins were installed notably along Coronation Parade/Sunny Sands for the summer which were successful in meeting the demands of the hot summer and record visitor numbers.

The street cleansing service also supported with bulk bins and additional cleansing to a number of our popular public events; notably the air show and Sandgate Festival of the Sea. The street cleansing service, as a result of its activities, has been publically thanked by town and parish councils, which is greatly appreciated by the service/

At the end of the summer the council again targeted its resources by introducing 12 Big Belly Solar Compactor Bins into the Coastal Park. As members may recall this was in direct response to the increasing visitor numbers to this popular location which was stretching the existing bin capacity at this location and making vehicle access difficult.

The new bins were introduced before the last August bank holiday have proven successful with the compaction technology reducing the number collections needed with performance exceeding expectations. The new electronic monitoring has given us a glimpse of the future of how our streets can be managed. For example I can tell you today that the new bins have in the last six months collected 51,785 litres of rubbish.

The pilot has proven to be so successful that our neighbours in Dover have followed our lead and introduced their own pilot scheme.

Other highlights of how resources have been targeted include: -

- The replacement and addition of 30 litter bins across the district.
- The continued specialised cleansing of the Leas embankment, which is a challenge to keep clean. This will next take place in April.
- The street cleansing service has carried out jet washes of the memorial arch area in advance of the WW1 centennial events.
- The service will be supporting the Great British Spring Clean in March and any members looking to organise supporting events should contact me (Cllr Peall).

The street cleansing service will reviewing its seasonal activities again in anticipation of another busy summer.

Turning to the activities of the Environmental Protection team, the past year has seen an increased ramping up of environmental enforcement activity across the district.

In addition to the work the enforcement team does in co-ordinating the removal of unauthorised encampments across the district; a service that it carries out with great professionalism and I know is appreciated by members and the public. The enforcement team has also issued a record number of Fixed Penalty Notices, 189 in total and increase of 71 on the previous year. This includes the targeting of fly-posting, with 93 FPNs issued.

Furthermore in the past year, the team concluded 5 successful prosecutions for environmental offences including fly-tipping. These are often long and complex cases in terms of evidence gathering, often requiring joint working with other authorities. I pass my thanks to officers and supporting authorities for their hard work on this.

Another standout incident was when the team, whilst investigating a noise complaint from a property in Etchinghill, discovered in the process an illegal puppy farm. At this location they witnessed 30 dogs being held in poor conditions in kennels. Joint visits with Police were made and the land owner agreed to surrender the dogs and they were removed from the property.

Over the summer, targeted patrols were carried out during early mornings, late and evening patrols in hotspot areas to try and catch offenders with dogs off leads and dog fouling.

Enforcement Officers were on duty during Bank Holidays and weekends to focus on prime locations such as beaches, the Coastal Park, the Leas and the Harbour. We felt it important to ensure the officers are seen and engaging with the public during these busy times. It also backed up the work by the Waste Team ensuring litter bins were reported if overflowing and ensuring the appearance of the district was at its best. This worked very well, with several residents thanking the staff for being in the area.

But it is not simply about enforcement. The environmental protection team is also involved in educational initiatives like pop-up events promoting responsible dog ownership.

Events were planned in June at the Coastal Park in Folkestone, with nature trails, quizzes and drawings for the children, identifying how many people have dogs on and off leads and giving general advice to the public. Other events took place in July at Lympne where the team joined forces with a local dog show. These have proven to be popular and more will be planned later in the year.

The Enforcement Team also participated in the Lydd Community event day. The team shared educational information about responsible dog ownership, including ensuring dogs are chipped and details updated, feeding gulls, lighting bonfires and discarding rubbish and keeping the district looking clean.

In November the Enforcement Team conducted a Dog Fouling operation to say "Thank You" to all the responsible dog owners who picked up after their dogs. All local parks and gardens were checked in all 13 wards and the owners were invited to enter a prize draw for a £50 shopping voucher which was drawn in December. During this time, no one was found walking away from their dogs and leaving their mess behind.

Finally the Environmental Protection Team continues to lead on the district's response to unauthorised encampments.

In the autumn the Environmental Protection Team Leader organised a very successful training day around encampments. This involved around 50 senior representatives from Kent Police, MOD, KCC Gypsy and Traveller unit, Councillors, Parish and Town Clerks. This allowed all parties to be trained at the same time and to discuss new ways of dealing with unauthorised campers, which has led to the use of Community Protection Warnings and has now been served on the current encampments within the district.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

2. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Has the introduction of Area Officers been successful in reducing the amount of graffiti, litter and dog mess which cause numerous complaints from our residents?

ANSWER:

The short answer is 'yes'. The introduction of the Area Officer initiative as part of the wider transformation project has been a resounding success. In its first phase of just 3 months, the team have tackled and cleaned over 2,000 items of graffiti, cleared 34 fly tips, removed 771 fly-posters, taken down over 450 planning and parking notices and cleaned 16 further instances of litter and 1 instance of dog fouling. The team have also attended and helped to organise 28 community litter picks and a further 6 corporate social responsibility events where over 500 black bin bags of rubbish have been cleared from the district.

The presence of the Area Officers is helping to discourage further instances of graffiti and low level anti-social behaviour and is encouraging communities to come together and help tackle these issues.

It is gratifying to see the increase in community and corporate engagement in clearing litter.

The scheme had even gained regional recognition by the BBC.

It is a shame that so much is dropped and I would urge anyone seeing any of this antisocial behaviour to report it to the council.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

3. From Councillor Mrs Berry to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Jake Berry, Parliamentary Under secretary for Housing, Communities and Local Government, is promoting the Governments efforts to boost the Nations High Streets.

He highlights the £675 million future high street fund to co-fund innovative proposals around Transport, Housing and Public Services to, improve infrastructure and access to high streets and make the Towns fit for the future.

Can the Leader say if the Folkestone and Hythe District Council has applied for some of the said funding, bearing in mind the possible loss of Debenhams, and have we already started to plan ahead to make the Towns High Streets a more interesting place to visit.

ANSWER:

The Council is aware of the Government's recently announced Future High Streets Fund and is going to submit an Expression of Interest, which is the first stage of an application, by the deadline of the 22nd March. The Economic Development team, headed by Dr Katharine Harvey, is leading on this with the Corporate Director of Place and Commercial, John Bunnnett.

I can also report that Cabinet has, just this evening, considered making available a special earmarked reserve of £3m for the purpose of supporting the regeneration of our High Streets. These funds will be available as match funding to any relevant bid we make to the Future High Street Fund, and to support the economic improvement of these important areas of our district. You will be asked to endorse the amendment tonight.

In addition, the Council has established the Folkestone and Hythe Regeneration Board, and has already earmarked £250,000 to support the initial work of this board. The board will be Chaired by our Member of Parliament, Damian Collins, and the inaugural meeting is being held on the 1st March 2019. I'm delighted to report that key stakeholders from Homes England, Kent County Council, the Creative Foundation, Strand House, Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Network Rail, the Folkestone & Hythe Business Advisory Board, and Pillory Barn are joining us as members of the board so

that a strategic and purposeful approach is taken to support the regeneration of our district.

Finally, I'm aware of speculation about the future of Debenhams in Folkestone. I can report that our Corporate Director of Place & Commercial, John Bunnett, has already made contact with the owners of the building, along with other landowners of key sites in the town, and we are well placed to respond swiftly to any news of store closure.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

4. From Councillor Wilkins to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Can the Leader confirm that the expense of changing the name of the District Council last April was kept within £10,000 as promised?

ANSWER:

To date costs of £6,921.87 have been incurred or committed in respect of the name change, so I can confirm they have remained within the £10,000 budget allocated.

I think that as Visit Kent are able to report on the record number of visitors to the district it is due in part to the name change. I certainly have been congratulated by a number of local businesses on the change.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

5. From Councillor Gane to Councillor Ewart-James, Cabinet Member for Housing

Can the cabinet member please tell me what actions have been taken regarding derelict buildings and bringing them back into action?

ANSWER:

The Council is committed to working to bringing long-term empty and derelict properties back into use across the district. Bringing empty properties back into use is a key priority within the Council's current Corporate Plan.

During 2017/18, intervention by the Council resulted in 74 empty properties being brought back into use in the district. This was achieved through Shepway No Use Empty Loans, enforced sale (where sufficient council tax debt has arisen) and subsequent owners bringing homes back into use, and other enabling work completed by the Council to encourage the owners of empty homes to bring them back into use or to sell them on to buyers who do want to refurbish and bring them back into use. In appropriate circumstances, the Council's Planning enforcement officer also intervenes to tackle any properties that pose a detriment to the amenity of the area.

The Council works closely with Kent County Council to provide loans to the owners of long-term empty properties so that they can be brought back into

use. The award winning Folkestone and Hythe “No Use Empty Plus” loan scheme provides a local top-up to the KCC loans so that we can work with property owners to bring some of the most problematic empty properties back into use in the district. The scheme has been recognised as a national example of good practice. Over the last two years, the Council has provided loans totalling approximately £700,000, which has resulted in 46 long-term empty properties being brought back into use in the district. This would not have been possible without the loan funding made available by the Council. The loans will be repaid back to the council over the next three years, enabling us to fund further loans for other problematic empty properties in the district.

As you can see, the Council is fully committed to dealing with the problem of long-term empty and derelict properties across the district. They represent a wasted resource and once returned to use, provide much needed additional homes for the local community.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Was anything being done with regard to two long-term empty properties in Cheriton – ie the Old Chinese Takeaway and the White Lion pub?

ANSWER:

I am aware of these empty properties. There are some issues but these are being looked into.

6. From Councillor Mrs Lawes to Councillor Love, Cabinet Member for Customer and Digital Delivery

Why when you report a problem on FHDC website, do you no longer receive a report/Job number? How can the problem be chased or tracked without any reference? It states that the reporters contact details are optional. However if you do not leave details there is no record of the report ever being received.

ANSWER:

The previous system that was used would create a worksheet number as it directly integrated into the back office system. However, the system had reached its end of life and was no longer supported by the supplier (Northgate) and therefore was not available after the 31st March 2018. Whilst a long term replacement was being considered as part of the Council's Transformation Programme, an interim solution was developed to enable customers to continue to report issues, easily and conveniently, on line. If the customer provides an email address then they are sent a copy of the report they have made as an acknowledgement. If they do not supply an email address, there is still a record of the report, and the report still initiates action by this Council. Once the request has been reviewed by the Customer Services team, a reference is emailed to them prior to the respective issue being addressed by the appropriate team. Once the issue has been investigated, the respective team will respond accordingly.

In considering a future replacement, this Council's Transformation Programme will introduce a "My Account" function, which will enable customers to track the progress of any report, should they wish to do so. As a further extension of the service, the aim is also to enable automatic updates to be sent by text, which some customers may find more convenient. This improved service is targeted to be introduced by the end of this calendar year.

However, I must stress that there will be no compulsion on customers to supply contact details to this Council should they not wish to do so. It would be quite inappropriate to say to someone who simply wants to report a problem to us that they cannot do so unless they register. I want to make it easy for people to get in touch, and this Administration will not put barriers in people's way to bringing to our attention matters upon which they think we should act.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

7. From Councillor Mrs Lawes to Councillor Ann Berry, Cabinet Member for Transport

Following on from your consultation in January on CPZ extended for zones F + G. Is it not the case that this survey was weighted in favour of approval as in some cases only 3 people replied given 100%, with most streets parking fine during the day but terrible in the evening?

ANSWER:

The consultation gave residents the opportunity to voice their concerns about parking issues in their roads. Residents had the option to participate in the consultation. In a few roads i.e. Cambridge Terrace, Harvey Place, Margaret Street, and New Street, the responses received were fewer than 5 for each road. However, with the exception of Margaret Street, this response rate for a parking consultation was very good. The number of properties in each of these roads are quite few. The table below shows a breakdown of the responses for each road. Officers have assumed that residents who did not respond to the consultation have 'no opinion' about the parking proposals.

ROAD NAME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	NUMBER OF PROPERTIES	RESPONSE RATE %	YES	NO
Cambridge Terrace	4	8	50	3	1
Harvey Place	2	2	100	2	
Margaret Street	1	18	5.6	1	
New Street	4	16	25	4	

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

There were two deprived areas in the proposals. Why would you do this when you could cause serious hardship, and many of the residents don't understand the proposals?

ANSWER:

I realise some streets have difficulties, but we have to consider everyone. The consultation is to ask for people's views, and we can only take the views of those who responded. If the response is mainly 'no's', such as in the east of Blackbull Road, these roads would not be taken into consideration. The proposals would still need to go through KCC, and another survey would be done.