

Council 26 July 2023

Agenda item 9 (Portfolio Holder reports)

1. Report of the Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

I have been very busy since my last update. I have had many meetings with representatives of Government, Kent County Council, Parish Councils and local stakeholders groups. I have held many meetings with Otterpool Park LLP.

I was delighted to open the new toilet block in the Coastal Park, with water saving appliances, a green roof and photovoltaic panels (there are also toilets)!

I joined many other runners in the regular, weekly Park Run on the fantastic Folkestone Lees, which must rate as the Park Run with the most far reaching views in the Country.

I attended the Marsh Inspires event at the Marsh Academy in New Romney, which showcased local employers and businesses.

I attended the flag raising ceremony at the Civic Centre on Monday the 19th June. On Saturday the 24th June, I was proud and honoured to be invited by the Mayor of Hythe to join her in the celebration of the incredible men and women of our Armed Services during Armed Forces Day. I was equally please to attend the Armed Forces Day celebration on Sunday the 25th June, with the Mayor of Folkestone on Sunday.

I attended the Council meeting where it was agreed to move the Council towards a more democratic and inclusive administrative system. The Committee system will empower local democracy.

Following their announcement of cuts to local bus services I convened a meeting with Stagecoach to discuss. I can report a positive response and the Stagecoach Managing Director will be considering my views and reporting back to me.

I attended the Local Government Association Conference to learn what other local Councils are doing to overcome very similar problems to those we have in Folkestone and Hythe.

2. Report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

Alongside Susan, Jim and Connor I attended the LGA (Local Government Association) conference in Bournemouth at the start of July.

I attended (as an observer) the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee, wanting to see what they thought about the Finance Out-turn papers, Annual Review of 22-23, and revised KPIs prior to those papers going to Cabinet the following week. I listened, appreciated their scrutiny and advice, and accepted their recommendations at Cabinet the following week. A big thank you to all the

officers within the Finance that have done the huge amount of work on getting the provisional out-turns together prior to the external auditors reviewing it when they are now scheduled to visit in October.

I'm really keen to make sure that our financial processes are transparent and the finance team have made big improvements in process. The data on the Council website at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-payments-procurements> has been brought up to date with missing months data added, and will be updated on a regular cycle from now on.

Finally on Wednesday 12th we had the first meeting of the Constitution Working Group (comprising Group Leaders and one Independent representative) tasked to deliver a committee system by May 2024.

Philip from Bevan Brittan (our legal support in making the change) worked us through the process, the decisions we need to make, and the speed needed to deliver it. It's clear that to deliver the change we want in the time we need to minimise the number of committees (we said streamlined: it will have to be), give the different committees their own responsibilities (delegations) and be pragmatic on getting the system in place for May. But it remains perfectly deliverable as agreed, and on timetable to do so.

3. Report of Councillor Mike Blakemore, the Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration

I have enjoyed getting to know my Community & Collaboration portfolio over the last month, including many of the partners FHDC works with, as well as the council officers who bring so much knowledge and expertise and experience to delivering this important work.

I attended meetings of the Community Safety Unit and the wider Community Safety Partnership, took part in a workshop helping to develop and deliver an integrated care strategy and visited the county council for my first Police & Crime Panel. I was delighted to visit the Romney Marsh and Hythe community hubs and look forward to visiting their Folkestone counterpart soon. I also attended the flag raising ceremony outside the civic centre for Armed Forces Day.

I followed up a complaint from a resident about anti-social behaviour and, thanks to very prompt action by officers, was able to satisfy her that the situation had been improved and would continue to be monitored.

I also enjoyed getting to know FHDC's communications team a little better and began discussing with them how we can build on what they already do to ensure the council's various communication channels have as much impact as possible, are inclusive and provide opportunities to deepen engagement with residents. I also met with community groups interested in working more closely with the council.

I attended briefings on (and at) Dungeness, Otterpool Park and Folkestone harbour and seafront, as well as attending public consultation events for the first

phase of FHDC's scheme to transform Folkestone town centre and Kent County Council's revised Cheriton Cycle Scheme. Briefings and induction sessions continued, covering areas such as housing and homelessness, licensing and film classification.

Last but definitely not least, I took part in meetings of Cabinet and the Planning Committee.

4. Report of Councillor Polly Blakemore, the Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services & Building Control

It's been another busy month of continuing to meet key people across my portfolio, ongoing council training and getting stuck into the workings of the relevant areas of Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

The highlight for me this month has been the Electric Vehicle Charge Point (EVCP) Launch Event on Tuesday 27th June. This was an occasion hosted by Kent County Council here at the Civic Centre which included participants from district councils across Kent who are part of the initial rollout of EVCPs in council car parks. Due to the hard work and foresight demonstrated by this council, I was able to make a short presentation putting FHDC firmly at the vanguard of this enterprise. It was also inspiring to see Connected Kerb, the supplier and installer of the charge points, present their ambitious plans to meet demand in this crucial and evolving area. I was honoured with the job of 'cutting the ribbon' and declaring 'open' the charge points here in the council's own car park for the photocall. The next step in this exciting project is an on-street installation trial we will shortly be embarking on alongside Kent County Council to enable learning on the end-to-end process from site selection to installation.

As part of my Transport remit I have made decisions on the introduction of Traffic Regulation Orders and been in communication with residents regarding parking issues in the district. I have facilitated a meeting between officers and Cycle Shepway in order to ensure we are plugged into that group's expertise in the context of major infrastructure plans such as the Levelling Up Fund Town Centre regeneration and Otterpool.

On Friday 23rd June I joined the Environmental Enforcement Team down at Sunny Sands where they were launching their Paws for Thought campaign with a pop up event engaging with the public regarding the council's anti dog fouling work. This was the first event of more to come and forms part of the "Dog's Guide to the District" campaign focusing on dog restrictions as well as dog safety. There was depressing news from Stagecoach this month who, as well as announcing the imminent closure of their Cheriton depot, also warned of several potential service cuts to come. I have worked hard with the Leader of the Council and Kent County Councillor, Jenni Hawkins, to raise awareness, engage with residents regarding their concerns and feedback on these anxieties and frustrations directly to Stagecoach.

I have attended public consultations on the Levelling Up Town Centre project and on the proposed Cycle Scheme for Cheriton. It is so good to see residents engaging in their numbers with these all-important consultation exercises. In between all of the above, I have continued to meet with officers who have been instrumental in helping me familiarise myself with my portfolio. I've had the warmest of welcomes – thank you!

5. Report of Councillor Gary Fuller, the Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Accountability

It has been another busy month as the council moves towards achieving its stated aims. As part of this, I have regular meeting set up with the managers relevant to my portfolio. My first job has been to explore options for improving how councillors make use of IT to serve the public. This is ongoing but I hope that councillors will soon be able to more readily complete their roles.

I recently reported to Cabinet on the excellent efforts by our information governance team to ensure that data breaches and subject access requests are dealt with in a timely fashion. Sadly, there is a wider recruitment crisis in this very stressful area of work and staff turnover has been an issue, so we are very lucky to have such a great team. I look forward to the outcome of the initiatives they have put in place.

6. Report of Councillor Rich Holgate, the Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy

A fantastic month meeting many residents, groups and stakeholders across the portfolio. A personal highlight was joining the Folkestone Music Town monthly meeting and seeing the amazing success enjoyed at the Music in May festival.

Elsewhere in Tourism we welcomed several groups to the Civic centre this week to workshop improvements around the Visit Folkestone Hythe website and look forward to seeing the outcomes from that session.

Our biggest effort has been around generating awareness for the latest public engagement of the Folkestone Place Plan. Amongst an online campaign, updating the website and network invites the incredible Area Officers also supported in the delivery of 4,000 leaflets to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Huge credit to the officers in the volume of work involved, and I look forward to meeting many residents at the event to discuss their thoughts and feedback.

Plenty of work to do as we look ahead, including meeting several Heritage groups to discuss current opportunities and challenges and unpicking challenges in our Levelling Up Fund work.

7. Report of Councillor Stephen Scoffham, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity

Electric Charging Points

Along with Cllr Polly Blakemore I attended the launch of District Wide Electric Charging Points on 27th June. Folkestone is working in partnership with a company called Connecting Kerbs and is taking a lead in this area. There are now 103 charging points in 26 different car parks which have already supplied 12,000 charging hours.

Community Projects

I participated in a vibrant meeting of the Elham Community Shed group on 22nd June. The group has a range of exciting plans for the future, many of which involve sustainability and carbon reduction.

Councillor Training

As well as the new councillors' induction training run by South East Employers, I have participated in training sessions on Communications and Social Media, Housing and Homelessness and Chaining Skills. I also attended a full day 'awayday' on roles and responsibilities of cabinet members on 13th June.

Liaison with outside bodies

I have had individual meetings with a number of key groups and organisations relevant to my portfolio. These include:

- Director and Officers for Council for Protection of Rural England (Kent Branch)
- Director and Planning Officer for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (North Downs)
- Manager for Kent and Essex, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds,

District Wide Carbon Reduction Strategy

I presented the District Wide Carbon Reduction Strategy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27th June following detailed discussions with officers. The strategy will now be presented to Cabinet on 12th July to seek approval for public consultation.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

I have been engaging with officers regarding this strategy which will be used as part of the evidence base for Local Plans and to identify priorities for joint working and future action. It was being submitted to cabinet to approve and note on 12th July.

8. Report of Councillor Rebecca Shoob, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

I've been pleased to meet more of the housing team officers and continue to be impressed by their dedication and professionalism. The team has been a huge support working with me to progress the housing casework coming in from across the district.

I was invited by the Rainbow Centre to hear about their plans and concerns for the coming year and know that our officers are well aware of the challenges ahead and the work to be done.

It was a pleasure to meet Elaine, chair of the Strategic Tenants Advisory Panel (STAP) ahead of meeting the other panel members at one of their regular meetings. The panel members put in a huge amount of work to ensure that tenants' experience and knowledge shapes how the housing service is delivered.

I've had briefings from officers on the procurement process about to get underway to replace the current telecare infrastructure ahead of the analogue phone system being finally phased out.

It was very informative to join neighbourhood inspections outside my own ward, both to get an overview of the different types of housing across the district and the types of repair and maintenance issues the teams deal with.

I also tagged along with some of the STAP members who were judging the annual Garden Competition. I was delighted to have a look at the Tyson Hills Community Garden which many of us will have whizzed past on the main road (it's behind the multi-coloured railings in Folkestone!). A real inspiration for what neighbours can achieve together.

9. Report of Councillor Jeremy Speakman, the Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

This month I have been involved in the following activities;

- Meeting with Councillors and Officers from KCC and Hythe Town Council regarding concerns over weeding control policy in the area
- Opening of new toilet block at Lower Leas Coastal Park with the Leader, Councillor Jim Martin
- Visit to Hythe Pool and meeting staff with the Leader Councillor Jim Martin
- Meeting with Cycle Shepway, Councillors and Officers for feedback on Council plans to improve cycling opportunities for residents
- Visit to Dungeness B for presentation by EDF
- Attendance at photoshoot event at Royal Military Canal with officers, the Leader Councillor Jim Martin and Grounds Staff to mark the well deserved retention of Green Flag status for the Royal Military Canal,
- Visit to Otterpool Park for launch of community engagement for Phase 1b
- Ongoing liaison with officers relating to general portfolio issues and developments, correspondence with residents regarding waste management, mowing and canal path maintenance
- Attendance at various training and briefing sessions on licensing, audit and governance and partnership arrangements.

Veolia Contract

There have been ongoing concerns expressed by Councillors and the public with Veolia's contract performance particularly regarding clearance of street waste bins at weekends along the Hythe/Folkestone seafront. Together with officers, we have taken robust measures in line with contractual compliance terms and conditions, and there has since been a marked improvement in Veolia's

performance. Issues remain in some areas of the district with their obligations towards weed control and this is being currently addressed.

Many Councillors will recall that in 2021 there was serious disruption to Veolia's services following rerouting of their collections. The claim against Veolia for costs related to the route optimisation project in 2021 has been settled. Settlement was agreed at £198K and covers the additional unbudgeted costs to the General Fund (additional working costs and garden waste rebate). This offsets any previous overspends for Waste Collections (ref General Fund Outturn Report 22-23 Finance and Scrutiny Sub Committee Appendix 1 variations).