

## **Council 20 July 2023**

### **Agenda item 9 (Portfolio Holder reports)**

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

- I have regularly held meetings with all directors and heads, internally.
- I have discussed with officers a variety of services, projects and initiatives.
- I have regularly attended leadership meetings with other party leaders.
- I have met regularly with Damien Collins MP and Roger Gough Leader of KCC.
- I have attended Kent Leadership Forum and the East Kent Leaders Group.
- I have held many meetings with local businesses and local community groups.
- I have attended the Constitutional Working Group.
- I attended a meeting of the 5 Parish Councils involved in Otterpool Park
- I attended the Royal British Legion's Freedom of the Town Celebration.
- I joined Kate Strong on her cycle around Britain (Hythe to Folkestone) highlighting some of our environmental projects.
- I attended meeting with Homes England regarding their future involvement in Otterpool Park - these discussions are on-going.
- I attended meetings with Otterpool Park LLP and potential Joint Venture Partners.
- I attended the Green Business Grants committee that awards grants to local business for environments improvements.
- I attended a briefing by KCC on the future of Family Hubs.
- I attended a meeting of Cycle Shepway.
- I attended the Community Planning Day at Sellindge on Phase 1b.
- I have met with Stagecoach, the bus service provider and had a great deal of correspondence.

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

In late August I attended an "Owners / Members" meeting for Otterpool led by the leader as portfolio holder for Otterpool Park. This was a part of the review of the management, structure, accountability, funding and targets of Otterpool Park and the LLP set up to run it. This will lead to a series of reports and discussions and decisions through the Autumn which will reshape the oversight and financing of the project and clarify its impact on the budget for coming years.

Meetings of the Constitution Work Group have continued. There is now a page live with details of the process, including future meeting dates and how members of the public can watch the meetings <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/democracy/change-cabinet-committee-system> There has been reasonable consensus (I think!) at the meetings to date, which a streamlined committee structure emerging, and considering how that aligns against the Council staffing structure. All Group Leaders are on the Working Group, and I'd

hope that we will start to be able to discuss some more detailed outline proposals with all Councillors at least before the end of October.

At my most recent catch-up with Andrew Hatcher, who leads the Welfare and Benefits team, Andrew also outlined a new leaflet the team had put together explaining the help they can offer in the most accessible way possible: I think its really helpful. There are also additional schemes that appear regularly the team can point people to, such as the current Kent County Council scheme offering a £100 food voucher to eligible households.

**The Welfare and Benefits team is one of the most frontline of services.** In difficult times for many of us, although Council budgets are really tight, we know the budgets of our residents are even tighter. **The support our Welfare team offers makes people's lives just that little easier, and that has to be the overwhelming priority where we can over the coming months.**

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

FHDC and other agencies were given the opportunity in late July to bid for up to £300,000 of 'safer streets' funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner for improvements to the area around Folkestone town centre but with an extremely tight deadline. I attended two meetings with partners involved in putting together the bid, which was submitted on 14 August, and a subsequent meeting to discuss communications. Led by FHDC this was a tremendous piece of joint working completed at speed and we will hear on 1 October whether the bid was successful.

Like many Members I have been concerned about some of the implications for youth services of Kent County Council's plans to introduce family hubs, especially the removal of funding for commissioned services including youth clubs in Hythe. I attended a members' briefing and worked with officers on a response to the formal consultation on the proposals as well as an open letter to the leader of KCC.

With Cllr Jim Martin, I visited Academy FM to meet the Station Manager to discuss his ideas for profiling ward councillors and the work of the council.

I also attended two meetings of Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Councils Liaison Committee as well as Cabinet and Planning Committee meetings and chaired my first Licensing Sub-Committee.

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

The two months since the last full council have been as busy as ever in all areas of my portfolio.

On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza was confirmed in a commercial poultry flock near Elham. The disease control zones with enhanced biosecurity measures around the premises included a 3km Protection Zone and a 10km Surveillance Zone. It was unfortunately necessary to humanly destroy the flock and the premises were disinfected. FHDC's Food & Safety Team were quick to contact both the affected farm and businesses who had been supplied by the farm and establish that there was minimal risk to public health. This information was fed back to the Food Standards Agency. Following successful completion of disease control activities, both the surveillance and protection zone were lifted on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023. Many thanks to Nicola Wilson and her team for her speedy response to this situation.

Alongside their regular enforcement activities, Karen Weller's team have been working hard all summer on the Beach Safety and Paws for Thought campaign right across the district.

The Planning Enforcement team are flat out on a multitude of cases. As much of their work is not dealt with publicly, there is a plan to publicise the numbers of ongoing cases, successful prosecutions etc so that residents can be aware of the extent of the portfolio of work in progress. Recruitment is ongoing in Building Control to bring this team up to full strength.

After returning to informal consultation on the extension of the CPZ B to confirm that a majority of residents supported the application, Turketel Road will now be incorporated into the zone. We also consulted on amendments to Zone C on The Stade to try and help ease the ongoing parking issues and the resultant effect on residents. Amendments were made following the consultation and two loading bays will be installed. Blue badge holders will not be permitted to park in these loading bays.

Stagecoach have now introduced their revised timetables reflecting many of the service cuts and reductions announced in the summer despite Kent County Councillor Jenni Hawkins' petition, which was signed by 1600 local bus users, and the pressure brought by local councillors not least Cllr Jim Martin. These cuts continue to be a cause for real distress and concern for many residents, affecting the elderly, school children, people trying to access hospitals and our commercial centres. Rural areas are particularly badly affected, for example the village of Lympne has been removed from the No 10 route. As a council, we will continue to make representations to Kent County Council as our Local Transport Authority in a bid to restore a decent public transport service for our residents.

In the context of these Stagecoach cuts I have been in conversation with Linda Marsh, Romney Marsh Partnership Senior Specialist, regarding the various community bus projects she has been championing. This is a now an issue for consideration right across the district.

I have continued to engage with Cycle Shepway and have a meeting scheduled with Click2Cycle, the app-led bike hire service, to see how the council can better support their ambitions in the district. Cycle Shepway are actively involved in

infrastructure regeneration projects for the district such as the Town Centre Levelling Up plan. They are making a timely push in schools to get students on to bikes to ease the pressure on roads and the reduced Stagecoach services. This is backed by an emphasis on education on the practicalities of cycling as a means of transport for children and their families to encourage people onto bikes.

Linked to all the above the Joint Transportation Board are considering reports on KCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Active Travel Cheriton Road consultation at their September meeting.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August, I attended my first meeting with the enterprising White Cliffs Community Rail Partnership, bringing together district and town councils between Westenhanger and Sandwich with the aim to provide a voice for communities and promote sustainable travel. I have also been in touch with Richard Moffatt of the ambitious Remembrance Line Association and the council has facilitated contact with Network Rail to allow access for a community clean-up of the disused railway line adjacent to Tram Road.

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

The council continues to improve access for residents to online services via My Account, with the IT team working hard to improve our infrastructure and reduce the need to make use of paper-based forms, phone calls, and emails. With so many services moving online, cyber security and data protection are key issues for the Council. Over the past few months, and going forwards, the IT team have put in place various new systems that will improve our resilience and ensure that any potential attacks are dealt with quickly and effectively. Many thanks to the team for all their efforts in getting these in place.

Underpinning the above is the excellent work by the customer services team and wider service areas to understand and improve the customer journey, taking every opportunity to introduce quicker online options and to identify any areas for improvement. A key strength has been training team members to manage a range of query types and identifying opportunities for service areas to deal with more complex queries. This is ongoing work and, along with the increased take up of My Account, I expect the Council and the public to reap the benefits over the coming years.

The council has also recently received an audit report on waste services. This report outlines areas for improvement in the management of street cleansing. I'm pleased to note that officers have responded positively and proactively to put in place the necessary actions and processes to ensure that we maximise the opportunity to improve the services we offer.

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

A typically quieter August has given me the opportunity to reflect on our efforts and think about some of the more pressing challenges ahead.

I have spent time at some of our fantastic Summer events and spoken to a huge variety of residents on what events do well, what they would like to see more of and what events they enjoy less.

Elsewhere it was a pleasure to finally meet and discuss with Heritage groups to understand how and where we can return some focus to the wonderful Heritage we have across our district. Look forward to furthering this in the weeks ahead.

Finally, having seen such fantastic engagement at our recent levelling up consultations we have begun to consolidate this feedback into meaningful changes and alterations to the plans. I look forward to sharing more in due course.

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

I have been working on a broad front both to support sustainability related initiatives across the District and working to identify options and priorities for the months ahead. The importance of focussing on the chalk downlands has become increasingly apparent.

### **Site visits**

- Attended a briefing session at Dungeness Power Station (7<sup>th</sup> July)
- Toured the new housing development at Sellindge at the invitation of Quinn Homes (20<sup>th</sup> July)
- Supported plans to introduce new plastic recycling bins at Sunny Sands (15<sup>th</sup> August)
- Inspected the sea defences at Hythe Firing Range (25<sup>th</sup> August)
- Met with Kate Strong as she passed through Folkestone on her Climate Cycle round Britain (30<sup>th</sup> August)

### **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy**

Cabinet adopted the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy on July 12<sup>th</sup>. This identifies over 100 needs, opportunities and priorities for the District. Work is now being undertaken to identify actions which are within the control of the Council that might usefully be pursued. At the same time, the opportunity to implement the strategy in conjunction with external bodies and organisations such as the White Cliffs Partnership and the North Downs Area of Outstanding is being considered.

### **District Wide Carbon Reduction Strategy**

The strategy is now being prepared for public consultation. A meeting of the Carbon Innovation Lab which forms one element of the carbon reduction strategy was held on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Community Liaison and Engagement**

A joint meeting organised by Cllrs James Butcher, Elaine Martin and myself was held at Elham Village Hall on 2<sup>nd</sup> September to explore local concerns and priorities. This was an informal and open event, which was designed to gather opinions from across the rural community.

### **Planning issues**

There have been a considerable number of planning issues within the North Downs East ward which I represent together with James Butcher and David Godfrey. Several of these involve camp and caravan sites. One of them involves motor sports. Traffic speeds on the A260 in Densole is another issue. Further afield and after several site visits and research into the issues involved, I have asked for the proposal for a photovoltaic solar array at Pent Farm, Postling to be called in for consideration by the Planning Committee as it is a matter of public interest.

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

Since the last report, I have been on further neighbourhood inspections across the district and seen more of the work the teams do on the ground with tenants and with looking after our homes.

I was delighted to attend the official opening of the newly refurbished and retrofitted Ross House and to hear positive feedback from tenants on how they are finding it. It was great to see the solar panels, heat pumps and the high level of insulation now in place that I hope will make them appreciably more comfortable homes to live in.

I've had various briefings from officers. In particular, I was very pleased that we have been awarded government funding for 5 additional council homes, under a scheme to provide homes for Afghan refugees.

Finally, I joined officers, tenants and procurement advisers to hear presentations from potential providers to replace the current analogue telecare system.

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

Assets and Operations teams continue to maintain a busy schedule including the following:

Connect 38 - preparing for letting and following up expressions of interest.

Biggins Wood site – resolved issues that were holding up sale to the developer.  
Ship Street and High View sites progressing towards being marketable.

The Varne site ready to exchange contracts for sale.

Coast Drive Beach Huts ongoing with some issues to resolve with Crown Estates.

Shorncliffe Pavilion handover issues with Taylor Wimpey remain unresolved and the matter is being escalated.

Grounds maintenance have had a challenging year with extended mowing season and staff recruitment issues.

Coastal Park play area being assessed for repairs to towers.  
Resurfacing of Royal Military Canal path completed.

Toilet handwash units have been replaced in all toilets and electrical inspections of facilities are underway; the roof is being replaced in High Knock toilets and graffiti removed from Radnor Park toilets.

#### Veolia Contract for Waste Services

Since the Spring when there were significant issues with street cleansing, Veolia's performance did start to improve. At that time The East Kent Partnership audit of the Council's joint contract with Dover District Council took place mainly in the Dover area. I am pleased that the report acknowledges the improvement in the waste collection service, which is running well after a difficult start to the contract.

The Audit report has however, also identified the need for improvements in the street cleansing, how this is monitored, and the effectiveness of the Waste Team. I am particularly concerned with the robustness of the cleansing arrangements over the weekends and along the coast. As you may know, the Waste Team is managed on our behalf by DDC, and I am pleased that the Auditors have accepted our Action Plan to address these issues. However, if more fundamental changes are needed to how the waste team operates then I am also willing to consider these. I am meeting shortly with my counterpart at DDC to discuss the recent audit and other issues.