

Council – 21 September 2023

Councillor Questions:

1. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

Will you meet with me and other District Councillors from the Marsh to see if we can mutually improve Romney Marsh residents' access to council services?

2. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy

As we are approaching the end of the Summer season, what are the District Council doing and going to do to in order to support, increase and welcome Tourism on the Romney Marsh for 2024 and beyond?

3. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

My constituents and I were appalled to read in the Report before the Audit and Governance Committee about the standards or lack of them from Veolia in the street sweeping of this district. As you know, Veolia are being paid to deliver a Grade A service but at best, in my view, providing a Grade C or worse. They are not, among other things, seemingly mechanically brushing the streets or removing weeds and other detritus in accordance with the contract. To give but a few examples.

When can the taxpayers of this council expect this contractor to be brought into line, and also be required to do what its paid to do or failing that, be given appropriate notice for the council to bring the street sweeping service back in house?

4. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

I would like to know the councils position on bus services to and from the Marsh. It's been brought to many of the Marsh Councillors attention that due to these modifications, numerous residents from rural parts are now left without a feasible public transportation option to commute to work in Folkestone or Ashford. some students who attend the Folkestone Girls School and Harvey Grammar School, find themselves without the crucial service to get to their schools. And perhaps even more important it can take up to 3 hours to get to Hospital by public transport and if you have an early appointment now not possible. Could the council explain the rationale behind this abrupt service change and what steps are being considered to ensure that the transportation needs of Romney Marsh residents are adequately met, keeping in line with the broader ethos of equal service delivery across the county?

5. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

For 14 enriching years, the Romney Marsh has had the privilege of the Romney Marsh Partnership. But since May, there's been no updates. In fact complete radio silence. The officer whose singular duty is to coordinate this group and be accessible to both district councillors and those from Town and Parish Councils. Not to mention, engaging with key stakeholders such as Magnox, Lydd Airport, EDF, and the Environment Agency.

Secondly, concerning the chairman's position, which was intriguingly decided by you rather than a democratic vote by Marsh members (as has previously been the case that the members within the Marsh actually vote for a chair), it appears this individual might be a tad swamped with all the other positions that you have given him. Will there be an opportunity this year for a gathering of district, county, town, and parish councillors?

6. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor M Blakemore Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration

In light of the challenges many residents of Folkestone and Hythe district are facing, my primary question to you is: Will the council continue to pledge its support to community hubs which play a pivotal role in catering to not just the elderly, but also to other individuals who heavily depend on these crucial services? Given the recent slashes to county budgets, the commitment of the council in this regard is paramount. Can you reassure the people of the Romney Marsh.

7. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy

I would like to inquire about the status of the new "Visit Folkestone and Hythe" website which was anticipated to launch around the time of the new administration's inception. Additionally, it was communicated that several new applications would be introduced, offering free registration for local businesses. Considering the substantial investment that has been made towards these projects, could the council please provide an update on the current position and developments regarding the website and these applications?

8. From Councillor Chapman to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

A resident who doesn't drive contacted me to explain the difficulties he has had disposing of a broken hairdryer. Veolia will not take it, the KCC website states that anyone visiting their recycling centre must visit by car and not on foot, and when he emailed this council he was told that the only option was to

pay £35 for a bulk collection service. Can we look at establishing a way that residents who don't drive can dispose of broken electrical items more easily?

9. From Councillor Chapman to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

My ward is one of the most deprived in Kent and in the top ten percent most deprived in the country. Many residents don't have cars to take larger items to the tip and cannot afford the £35 bulk collection fee. This then leads to items such as mattresses being discarded on the street. Could we look at ways of helping those on lower incomes with this issue?

10. From Councillor Chapman to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

A constituent recently reposted to me that his bin had been destroyed in an arson attack. This is a possible hate crime and is being investigated as such. When he called the council to ask for a new bin he was told he would have to pay, despite explaining the circumstances. He did so because he needed the bin. Can we look at refunding the money that he paid, and consider being a little more flexible on this matter in the future?

11. From Councillor Jones to Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy

The Folkestone Airshow clearly brought a lot of benefits to the people and businesses in Folkestone. This was understandably put in the budget by the previous administration, but I have been asked by the public how much it cost the District Council and what provision there is in the current budget for events to promote tourism in the other towns and villages in the District?

12. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

Given the disruption of the reduced Bus services on the Marsh due to the new revised timetables being introduced by Stagecoach, residents are rightly concerned about the safety of their loved ones both young, old and infirm who are reliant on public transport, with buses being cancelled unannounced, not turning up or not even completing journeys or missing connections. Leading to increased loneliness and danger especially among our elderly and younger population. What is the council doing to ensure the residents of Romney Marsh and other areas of the district are not further inconvenienced by the cancellations, chaos and confusion caused by Stagecoach, and can we repeatedly remind Kent County Council to apply pressure on Stagecoach, following reports - that KCC was also awarded an additional £2.3m on top of the original £19.1m for bus services earlier in the year.

13. From Councillor Walker to Councillor Tim Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

As Members of Labour and Co-operative Party both Cllr Cooper and I were delighted to see this council had passed a resolution in September 2019 declaring itself to be a fair tax council. We were both disappointed, however, to note the subsequent lack of communication and promotion of it. When can the council taxpayer of this district expect this council to promote and advertise the fact that we are a Fair Tax Council on its website and other media? It would be good to see the council clearly stating that it welcomes local companies to bid for local services and that it also abhors profits from council taxpayers being diverted overseas.

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

There is real concern from Marsh residents that fly-tipping is getting worse both in terms of frequency and size of the load dumped. In addition, there is a growing sense that the council is not fully on the side of residents in tackling this issue.

National policy only obligates the council to be responsible for fly-tipping that is sited on our land, The concern, which I share, is that in practice this rule seems to be applied in an overly strict and often unfair way. In particular on the marsh where we have small lanes, often without fences or hedges separating fields from the road, I think this rule is being used to avoid collecting rubbish that is quite clearly on the side of the road and should be collected.

More generally, I believe the council should take responsibility for rubbish dumped close to the roadside, even if on private land. This illegal activity is not the fault of the landowners, and if the council takes the issue seriously and wants to get a real grip on the problem, it needs landowners and residents to keep reporting to enable investigation. Can you address these concerns and consider a review of our policy and approach in practice?

15. From Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

At the Constitutional Working Group on 31 August it was agreed that future meetings of the Working Group be held online/as hybrid meetings, and broadcast on the Internet for the public to view, but the public would not be able to attend meetings in person – this decision was against external advice. Can the Leader confirm that this decision will apply to all future working groups and informal cabinet meetings?

16. From Councillor Godfrey to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

It is well known that Hythe Swimming Pool requires extensive maintenance at considerable expense as well as having a very high carbon footprint. Can you update the Council on the latest position regarding maintenance and its continued safe operation?

17. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Fuller, Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Accountability

What use is the council currently making of Artificial Intelligence both in its internal and resident facing processes?

18. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

As summer is leaving and the weather starts changing towards cold and wet weather can the council confirm that as we move into Winter what will be the SWEP conditions this year, to ensure that no one is forced to sleep out in of the coldest and most dangerous of weather this year?

19. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

I was recently contacted by a local Care Home which has had to close due to increased heating bills, amongst other reasons. The owner of this care home is willing to offer District council the property for rent, to house homeless and vulnerable people. They have reached out to the council but have had no reply. I would have thought that this sort of agreement if it can be arranged would provide longer term stability, emergency housing as well as a stable base from which people can start to rebuild their lives. Would the Cabinet Member be willing to meet to discuss this further please ?

20. From Councillor Keen to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control

Having recently experienced the dog warden procedure at FHDC and also having been contact by members of the public who have had similar experiences. The procedure we use is not flexible and does not take into consideration the animals health or wellbeing or the trauma that this cause for the owner. I would like to know, how often are these Kennels are checked for suitability, do we carry out spot checks, and do we know what conditions the dogs are kept in? Why are dogs transported so quickly after being picked up and before the owners has had chance to retrieve their pets, before both are put through a traumatic experience.

21. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

There appears to be issues with our ground's maintenance, on social housing estates in the Harbour Ward. Residents have reported infrequent grass cutting, hedges that lead to their homes not being cut and have become impassable and also footpaths that are over grown and which are unsafe and also force pedestrians into the road. Grass is left all over the footpaths and in turn is walked into people house. Why are these areas left so long in between cuts.

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

Noel Redding, born in Folkestone and part of the world famous Jimi Hendrix Experience, is a historical figure for many people of the town. As Folkestone is the world's first music town it would be fitting to honour one of its famous musicians. Can the council advise on its policy or process for erecting a public statue?