

Council 29 November 2023

Agenda item 9 (Portfolio Holder reports)

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

1. To start with, some good news! I successfully completed the Folkestone Half Marathon, a brilliant event which I have completed a number of times before and one I highly recommend to everyone, including Councillors!
2. I have been honoured to attend a number of events with an Armed Forces connection in my role as Leader but also Armed Forces Champion: the Gurka Memorial Service, the Dedication of the Royal British Legion Standard in Hythe, Armed Forces Champion training at Ashford Barracks and of course Remembrance Sunday, which was both poignant and moving.
3. The Leaders of the four political groups and Independent Councillor Paul Thomas have been meeting regularly as we move towards a committee system.
4. I have attended many meetings regarding Otterpool Park with government agencies, developers and potential Joint Venture Partners, these discussions continue.
5. I have been delighted to visit many businesses in our District: Holiday Extras, who have created one of the most exciting and dynamic work environments I have ever been in, Port Lympne who, at the height of the summer season, employ over 600 people full or part time and Church and Dwight a long established Folkestone Company who are busy making and exporting nasal spray to China! Impressive, dynamic, forward looking, our business community creating jobs, offering training and giving people a future. This Council is a friend to good business.
6. Princes Parade hoarding: We are now out to tender to obtain prices from contractors to remove the hoarding and the concrete blocks that support it, and then erect a low level fence around the site. Once the site is fenced we will be consulting next year to ask local people for their views on the future of Prince's Parade.
7. Following their announcement of cuts to local bus services I have been in almost daily contact with Stagecoach to discuss. The Stagecoach Managing Director will be considering my views on how we might save further routes. There have been meetings, email and some difficult discussions with Stagecoach but so far my only success is the No.10 bus service which has been reinstated to Lympne.
8. I have been in regular contact with Southern Water mainly because of the sewage on the Copperfield's Estate in Lydd, the flooding on Udan Rd in Dymchurch and the failure of the pumps at the Range Road pumping station in Hythe. I have a site meeting with Southern Water and KCC Councillors on 1st December.
9. Along with many coastal District Councils I attended a 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. As a result of the meeting I signed a joint letter along with all the other leaders, addressed to OFWAT, the water regulator, asking them to take action against Southern Water.

10. 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.

11. I have held meetings with Go Folkestone to try and locate the foundation stone to the long demolished Folkestone Pier in its original location.

12. I was delighted to attend the opening of the Sunflowers Room on the Bayle, I was equally pleased to attend a breakfast prayer meeting at the Baptist Church in Cheriton and I ate too much when I attended the Rotary Club dinner in Hythe.

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

Clearly the key focus of the Finance part of my portfolio has been to progress the work on the budget for next year, and the Medium Term (4 year) Financial Strategy (prediction) that goes with it.

The series of documents that support the budget are about to start to come to Cabinet and Council over the next three months. Remember that the Strategy published this time last year by the previous administration predicted we would overspend revenues by over £18m in the 4 years 2023-27, running us out of money around year 3.

We cannot do that. The review we are undertaking is "root and branch" (there are 5000 ish lines in our budget - we've looked at all of them!) in order to increase revenues and cut spending to leave us with a budget and projection that gives us long term future. I'd like to that Susan, all Directors, CMT and all officers with their work on this, and especially the work on the transformation project which is likely to generate significant savings in itself.

We are still a few weeks away from being able to start to publish the outcome of the work, and there is still going to be a need to make some difficult decisions. No-one likes increasing service costs, but fundamentally we are going to have to. No-one likes cutting discretionary services, but in some areas we are going to have to. However we have very limited scope on increasing our council tax, and staff wage increases and other inflationary pressures higher than that increase can be. Something has to give. But - spoiler alert - the MTFS we will publish this November will not show an £18m shortfall over the next 4 years. Stay tuned.

Monitoring of the current years budget is also crucial however: no point having a budget you don't stick to. I'm pleased to say that at the end of September we were predicting (all due caveats apply!) an underspend on the revenue budget for the full year of just over £500,000. That is a result of a ruthless focus by officers and staff on keeping costs down, not filling posts if possible, and simply good housekeeping. It's only a prediction at this time, and we'll gain more certainty as the end of the year approaches, but it's a good place to be.

In terms of Governance the Constitution Working Group continues to meet. I think we now have a clear streamlined structure, with good checks and balances, to put forward to members. I was able to outline that "Two Lead Committee"

structure to Overview and Scrutiny Committee recently, and there will be an all member briefing on 11 December that I hope you can all attend.

I'm still confident we will deliver the new arrangements and the constitution that overlays it by May, within the budget Council agreed for the process. We will end up with a system that is open to much wider input and debate from across the Council and proportional across committees: exactly what we were aiming for.

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

Earlier this month I was delighted we were able to announce the success of the bid made in the summer for more than £335,000 of Safer Streets funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner. While the council led this bid, it involved other members of the Community Safety Partnership, who will together deliver targeted initiatives such as improvements to CCTV and radio networks in Folkestone town centre, increased patrols and initiatives to tackle violence against women and girls.

I have previously been involved in discussions around the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy and recently took part in a symposium to develop this further. The same week, I attended the launch of Kent Move Together (by Active Kent & Medway), where it was mentioned that we have one of the least active districts in Kent – not good if we want to improve mental and physical health. I also attended a meeting of the Health & Wellbeing Network run by Folkestone Sports Centre Trust.

In October, I had the enormous privilege of launching the district's mobile food service which the council has worked with the Rainbow Centre to provide and I helped celebrate the first birthday of Hythe Pantry. The mobile service, understood to be the first in the country to combine a mobile foodbank and food pantry service, also offers cost-of-living advice and support at the locations visited by the mobile van: Hawkinge Community Centre; Harbour Church, Folkestone; Folkestone Academy and Hardy Hall, Lydd. Cheriton Baptist Church will join these locations from January.

Last month I was privileged to chair the inaugural meeting of Folkestone Community Forum, which aims to bring together many community groups in the town, to take a forward-looking approach and give as many groups as we can a voice as Folkestone undergoes changes, including the Brighter Folkestone transformation of the town centre. Soon afterwards, nearly 40 community groups from across the district attended one of the regular networking events organised by the council: this one with the theme 'working together'.

Meanwhile, the council continues to press Kent County Council (KCC) on its intentions regarding Folkestone Library – now closed for almost a year – and we await with interest the results of KCC's consultation on youth services, which we responded to previously. The consultation results are due to be published soon

with a decision to quickly follow that could see funding removed from much-valued youth clubs in Hythe, including Shepway Autism Support Group.

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

Parking restrictions have now been introduced on Turketel Road which joined the Zone B CPZ in October. The two additional loading bays on The Stade are now also in effect to help with the parking issues in that area.

Stagecoach have reintroduced the No 10 bus service to Lympe with effect from Monday 13th November as a trial service so it's up to people to use it in order to prove that it is an indispensable service. We are keeping pressure on Stagecoach to restore a bus service that is fit for purpose in the light of the recent cuts and cancellations due to driver shortages.

I attended the Southeastern Stakeholder Forum where attendees were given an insight into the rail company's fleet and service modernisation plans and progress towards becoming more reliable, efficient and sustainable.

On a sunny afternoon in September I joined Cycle Shepway's Big Bike Ride to see how easy it was to cycle from Radnor Park to the Harbour Area – the answer is 'not very'! Events like this all help to inform infrastructure projects such as Folkestone – A Brighter Future.

There was good news at September's Joint Transportation Board where members voted to approve the proposed Active Travel Scheme for Cheriton which will see a 20mph zone introduced on the High Street along with walking and cycling improvements to make the area safer and more inviting for all. I met with Hawkinge Town Council to discuss parking issues in the town and am in contact with Kent County Council regarding possible solutions to obstructive parking causing delays and cancellations on the No 73 bus route. I joined a walk around at The Stade to review the ongoing problems with parking there with Councillor Meade and parking officers. Further areas for improvement were identified such as marking parking bays and installing on-road signage to deter illegal parking. These measures will be put in place in good time for the next summer season. Central Ward Councillors have arranged a public meeting to which I have been invited in order to meet residents, listen to and discuss their parking concerns and review the current situation. I have also been in conversation as regards parking in and around Hythe High Street. A draft version of the Parking Strategy has been delivered, is being revised and will shortly be reviewed by cabinet members.

Officers have been working hard on the update of Folkestone & Hythe's Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) with the associated planning work being carried out by AECOM. The stakeholder engagement event was held in early November with the next step being the public consultation.

The second Licensing Forum was held in the Council Chamber in September bringing together residents, businesses, the Police and council officers and members. The purpose of these forums is to facilitate a positive and collaborative conversation between the council and all stakeholders to enhance working relationships. Presentations were given by the Licensing Team and Kent Police which provided updates on licensed premises statistics, inspection activity and various initiatives being introduced across the district. The discussion centered around a need for an improvement in communication and engagement between the parties particularly as concerns community challenges such as the antisocial and criminal behaviour of people moving from one licensed premises to another within Folkestone town centre. In response to requests from stakeholders, Licensing Forums will be held more frequently in future with the next one scheduled in January 2024.

The mid-year Food Standards Agency Return has been completed with the team on track to complete the food hygiene inspection programme by 31st March 2024. With the rise in the number of food businesses in the district over the last five years, the number of food and hygiene complaints has also risen. Enforcement action undertaken so far in 2023 has increased by over 150% compared to 2022.

A Section 215 notice was served on the White Lion in Cheriton which has lain empty for nearly two decades and has deteriorated significantly. The owners have until November 2024 to complete a series of improvements to the building. Along with officers, whom I thank for their tireless work, I took part in the Star Chambers to identify budget priorities for 2024/2025.

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

In the past month, the team have been exploring ways to improve and streamline the support offered to the public. Most recently we have begun to discuss the potential to facilitate the support offered by local organisations through training and sharing appropriate information. A particular focus for this needs to be Romney Marsh, where take up of the Council's online My Account service is lower than in other areas of the district.

Government is also changing how complaints are handled in the public sector and the Council will be responding to that, making changes and suggestions as needed. This will require some internal changes going forwards, but I'm confident the team will take it in their stride.

The Polling District, place and station review consultation finished on November 17th, and the results should be going to the next meeting of the Audit and Governance committee. Many thanks to the Elections team for running this, for producing an excellent report, and for taking on board the suggestions received.

As this is the last Full Council meeting before Christmas, I would like to wish everyone at the Council and across the District a very merry Christmas. Thanks for all that you do to serve our district. I hope you get a well-deserved rest.”

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

A very busy period has seen us take great steps across the portfolio.

Having consolidated Phase 1 feedback we were able to share back with District residents the output of their thoughts in a simple 'you said, we did' fashion. It's an example of how this administration is living its intent to be transparent and engaging with communities.

Phase 2 engagement events are nearly upon us and I am looking forward to seeing many of our residents join us to share their thoughts and feedback on our plans. We have also invited schools and colleges too to ensure we are speaking to and including our 'future residents'!

On the note of working with our communities, we also kicked off the 'Folkestone Community Forum' with many key stakeholders across Folkestone. Cllr Blakemore and I had an array of fantastic feedback and support from the group and I am very excited this Forum is now up and running. A huge thanks to everyone involved in organising this working group.

The Folkestone Community Forum replicates a similar concept to that of our Romney Marsh Partnership which continues to play a significant role in delivering projects and change across the Marsh.

A standout moment since we last met was the launch of the Rural England Prosperity Fund which is looking to provide businesses across the district with grants to drive their business ambitions. Delighted to see several expressions of interest already and looking forward to many more.

Finally, as Summer closed out I spent several weekends enjoying music at the Leas Bandstand, organised by the Chambers. From DJs to a Pink Floyd tribute act - the events have been well attended and great to experience. I understand the owners of the Chambers are potentially looking to move on in the new year. I know I'm not the only one in wanting to thank Chris and Liz Smith for everything they have brought to the music scene in Folkestone and the District and wish them every success moving forward.

Looking ahead, we will be identifying how to better activate our Heritage strategy and ensuring the engagement events are well attended and all feedback captured.

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

The key issue since my last report has been the review of Council expenditure. This is a painful but necessary discussion which is necessary in preparing a balanced budget. It has also raised questions about the importance of the climate change and biodiversity agenda within the Council's operations.

Meetings and site visits

- Discussions relating to electrical recycling with Hythe Open Door Project (16th September and 12th October)
- Meeting and site visit to see the Community Fridge and Foodbank in operation at Wood Avenue, Folkestone (21st September)
- Visited Hawkinge Youth Club (28th September)
- Engaged with both local action group and Swingfield Parish Council regarding traffic mitigation measures on the A260 in Densole (2 October)
- Attended the launch of the KCC Making Space for Nature Report (5 October)
- Supported the Sustainable Fashion Show (Sandgate Environmental Action Group) (8 October)
- Liaison with Richard Haines regarding White Cliffs Countryside Project (16th October)
- Attended the This is Our Village open day at Elham Village Hall (21st October)
- Site visit and meeting with Kent Wildlife Trust at Covert Wood (16 November)

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

Work continues to identify actions within the control of the Council that might usefully be pursued.

District Wide Carbon Reduction Strategy

The strategy is open for public consultation. I have been involved in the process of bringing the report to this point, contributing to the foreword, and speaking on a short video presentation to encourage participation.

Carbon Innovation Lab (CIL)

This group continues to provide a valuable focus for local action groups and met on 20th November.

North Downs Forum

The Forum is slowly emerging as a valuable Think Tank for priorities and actions in the NDE and NDW wards. A second meeting took place on 27 November. These are informal events to generate ideas and are open to anyone who is interested.

Beach erosion

I answered questions about the beach defences between Folkestone and Sandgate on both BBC South East and BBC Radio Kent in early November.

Bid for UNESCO Cross Channel Global Geopark

I have been promoting the bid for the UNESCO Global Cross Channel Geopark both within and beyond the Council. The bid is being prepared jointly by the Kent Downs AONB and the Parc Naturel Regional des Caps et Marais d'Opale. As well as drawing attention to the relationship between people and nature the project aims to celebrate and protect the chalk landscapes in both regions, enhance tourism and bring communities closer together.

Planning issues

There are a number of long-standing planning issues relating to caravan camps and outdoor activities in the North Downs East ward which are now being actively investigated which I am watching closely. I have also been involved with discussions about parking problems in Hawkinge and traffic management on the A260 in Densole.

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

I was pleased to attend the latest Strategic Tenants Advisory Panel which was given a presentation of the results of this year's Tenant Satisfaction Survey. I was very pleased to note that satisfaction was mostly up on the previous year's results. Full results and analysis will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny before being shared in the next tenants' newsletter due in January.

I also attended the first STAP scrutiny meeting which looked at how the council handles complaints about housing. This was a hugely useful session and I look forward to the results of the follow up meetings.

As agreed by cabinet earlier this month, a consultation will be starting soon on charging tenants for telecare (Lifeline) services at full cost, as these have to date been subsidised by the Housing Revenue account.

Work on the Repairs and Maintenance options appraisal has recently been concluded and will be reported to cabinet next month.

The draft Housing Revenue Account business plan, the result of huge amounts of hard work from the team, was presented to OSC earlier this month. I was absolutely delighted that the team have been able to build in budget for adding new homes to our housing stock, be that through new builds or purchasing existing properties. The HRA faces huge pressures and has to do a lot of things: looking after our existing homes and tenants is absolutely essential – but so is expanding the number of homes available for social rent.

The financial pressures faced by local authorities across the country are huge – as are the pressures faced by many of our residents. I was very pleased to support the recent temporary housing crisis summit convened by Eastbourne Council, which called for urgent government action to address this growing crisis. Although our district has a relatively low use of temporary accommodation, the issue of a low and out of date Local Housing Allowance is a significant issue for us. A letter, signed by Cllr Jim Martin and 118 other council leaders, demanding urgent action on rates of Local Housing Allowance and other measures to help

address the growing crisis, was sent to the Chancellor following the summit. I look forward to the response.

Finally, I must thank officers for swiftly implementing the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol ahead of storm Ciaran and the outreach team and our partners who worked hard to make sure that everyone who wanted to take up accommodation was able to. Thank you also to Members and others who alerted the team to people who may have been in need of help.

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

As well as casework and attending meetings relating to my Hythe Rural Ward, I continue to have regular meetings and correspondence with relevant officers and residents on matters specifically relating to my portfolio. In addition I have been engaged in the following activities;

- Oral update and report in relation to my portfolio to Hythe Town Council
- On site visits to Radnor Park toilets to assess progress of refurbishment
- Meeting with Councillor Edward Biggs, Dover District Council to discuss shared responsibilities in oversight of the Veolia Waste Services Contract
- Meeting with Hythe Environmental Community Group to discuss expansion of current e-waste recycling scheme and ongoing correspondence.
- On site meeting with Councillors Adrian Lockwood and Jackie Meade and officers to investigate issues with street cleansing in their Ward and subsequent correspondence.
- Meeting with residents from Lympe regarding their concerns about the Council's feasibility study to site a solar park in the village.
- On site meeting with Councillor Davison and local resident to investigate concerns regarding an abandoned plot of land and siting of bulk refuse bins
- On site meeting with residents from Leas Cliffs to investigate concerns expressed regarding management of vegetation along the cliff.

Implementation of changes identified in the Waste Services Audit action plan has been a key focus in recent weeks. This involves continuing review discussions with the Dover Waste Management Team and relevant officers from Dover District Council. I have also met with my counterpart in Dover, Councillor Edward Biggs to consider ways of improving the effectiveness of the service and joint working arrangements. Recent extended periods of rainfall coinciding with leaf fall and gully maintenance issues have clearly been a challenge for Veolia and there has been some localised flooding.

Projects at Ship Street, Coast Drive and Biggins Wood as well as others remain on track and the income derived will be of major benefit to the council. Smaller scale schemes such as the concession and new toilet block at the Coastal Park may bring less income but have proved to be very popular with the public. New Pétanque courts are being installed at Radnor Park following money raised by a

community group. Through the winter, new fish swims will be installed for fishing on the Royal Military Canal after grant funding from the EA (Environment Agency). The Changing Places Toilets for Disabled Adults Project is on track to deliver new facilities at The Coastal Park, Radnor Park and Dymchurch main car park.