

FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 29 November 2023

Present: Councillors Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Mike Blakemore, Polly Blakemore, James Butcher, Bridget Chapman, Tony Cooper, Laura Davison, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Rich Holgate, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Anita Jones, Nicola Keen, Adrian Lockwood, Alan Martin, Elaine Martin, Jim Martin, Connor McConville, Jackie Meade, Tim Prater, Stephen Scoffham, Rebecca Shoob, Jeremy Speakman, Paul Thomas, Belinda Walker, David Wimble and John Wing

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Gary Fuller and Liz McShane

51. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Lockwood made a voluntary declaration in respect of the fourth motion on the agenda (Minute No 60) as the progressive procurement could be of benefit to local companies, and he owned and ran a local business.

Immediately prior to the consideration of the third motion on the agenda (Minute No 60), relating to accommodation for care leavers, Councillor Keen declared an Other Significant interest as she was employed by KCC. She left the Chamber during the debate, and returned after the vote had taken place.

52. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chair.

53. Chair's Communications

The Chair gave the following communications:

“Since my last communication I have had the great honour of representing the district throughout our national period of remembrance. I first attended Dover Cruise Terminal to pay my respects to those men from Belgium, France and the United Kingdom who made the ultimate sacrifice. I witnessed the machine corp and the annual remembrance Sunday Service and Parade. I visited the plaque to commemorate the entry of the unknown soldier onto to British shores before their journey to their final resting place. The anonymity of the unknown soldier means that he belongs to all of us. Through him we collectively pay tribute to all who perish in war, wars from the past, the present and wars unfortunately yet to come.

Today instead of wearing red to signify the human deaths in war and purple to commemorate the many animals that died in the worlds wars I am wearing orange. Orange is in honour of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. This is an international campaign that takes place annually to raise awareness about and combat gender-based violence, this includes various

forms of violence and discrimination targeting individuals based on their gender. The campaign starts on November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and concludes on December 10, which is Human Rights Day, because violence against women and girls is the most pervasive and prevalent human rights violation.

UN Women UK prevalence of sexual harassment statistics found that only 3% of 18-24 did not recall experiencing sexual harassment, 26% of women aged 15+ have been subjected to intimate partner violence. In 2021, 56% of female homicide victims were murdered by their intimate partner or family member. In politics a survey by the IPU found that psychological violence affects over 80% of women parliamentarians and over 40% of surveyed women parliamentarians received threats of death rape, beatings and abduction during their term.

Politics can be hard but it is even harder having to sit back and not have a voice in decision making. That is why myself and the Vice chair Anita Jones did a talk with Folkestone Women's Forum to encourage more women into local and national politics. Another woman in politics regardless of her political shade is a win for all of us.

So today I ask that we stand in honour of all women. You may choose to stand in silence but I choose to stand and clap because many women have already been silenced. Orange is a colour of hope, visibility, it's vibrant and enthused with life and I will honour the lives of those who are no longer here. Please stand for one minute and honour women in the way you wish to".

54. Petitions

There were no petitions to be presented at the meeting.

55. Questions from the Public

The questions asked, including supplementary questions, and the answers given are set out in Schedule 1, appended to these minutes.

56. Questions from Councillors

The questions asked, including supplementary questions, and the answers given are set out in Schedule 2, appended to these minutes.

57. Announcements of the Leader of the Council

The Leader gave the following announcements:

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- “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 Ghurka 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 referenced 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”.

Councillor McConville, Leader of the Labour Group then responded to the announcements and echoed his support in respect of the Leader completing the half marathon. He also stated he was glad to have joined the Leader at the opening of the Sunflowers Room on the Bayle and looked forward to fostering community wealth building across the district. Everyone knew residents needed it. He echoed the comments in relation to Stagecoach, and expressed disappointment that they did not attend the recent consultation event relating to the new bus stop layout, and transformation of the current bus station. There were many residents who would have wanted to talk to someone from Stagecoach, and a lot of questions were taken in writing and sent to the directors of Stagecoach. They needed to be more involved in the community. He also stated, in respect of 'big business', it was important to recognise the challenges faced by small businesses in the current climate, and there had been a flurry of new businesses opening recently, particularly in Folkestone, and he hoped that this council, despite its stretched resources, gave full support to these new businesses in terms of queries on licensing, planning, food safety and all the other things they had to navigate. He also added that it was the last meeting before Christmas, and wished all staff and Councillors a festive and safe holiday period.

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee also responded and stated that she thought that the council had always been business friendly, and the previous administration had bought in lots of schemes. She added that the previous administration had not left a £18.5 million budget gap, but had saved by putting non-essential spending into action, £1.2million, and then a rebate of over £500,000. She stated that she was looking forward to the consultation on Princes Parade, and was hoping residents would realise the importance of the asset, and that something would be done with this asset. She added that without the previous administration, the council would not have had the Otterpool Park project, and every member of the council who was a previous member voted against it, but now stressed it's importance. She also stated that the previous administration had initiated the Folkestone Regeneration scheme and levelling up. She wished everyone a happy Christmas, and thanked all the staff who worked extremely hard, particularly given the challenging circumstances they faced at the moment.

The Leader then responded to the points raised by the Opposition Group Leaders and added that he echoed the thoughts in respect of staff being hard working, and highlighted the support he had personally received from officers, which said a lot about the culture of the council. He referred to the homelessness count which had taken place the night before, and stated that the officer who had carried out this work had done so in their own time, unpaid. He then wished all Members a Merry Christmas.

Proposed by Councillor J Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Prater; and

RESOLVED:

That the announcements of the Leader of the Council be noted.

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

58. Portfolio Holder reports to Council

The Portfolio Holder reports had been circulated within the agenda pack and noted by Members.

59. Opposition Business

There was no opposition business.

60. Motions on Notice

1. From Councillor Mrs Jenny Hollingsbee, Leader of the Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs Jenny Hollingsbee presented her motion which sought support for nuclear energy production at Dungeness.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee,
Seconded by Councillor Wimble;

1. That the council confirm in writing their unequivocal support for a new era of nuclear energy production at Dungeness by writing a letter to:
 - Andrew Bowie MP, Minister for Nuclear and Networks
 - Roger Gough, Leader of Kent County Council
 - Damian Collins OBE MP, Member of Parliament for Folkestone and Hythe
2. That all members of the Cabinet, at every possible opportunity, actively promote Dungeness as a location for new nuclear power generation.

It was then proposed by Councillor J Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Scoffham;

That the motion be amended as follows:

- In the sentence “To confirm in writing our unequivocal support for a new era of nuclear energy production at Dungeness by writing a letter to:”
- In place of the word “nuclear”, add “clean” - in place of the words “at Dungeness”, add the words “in the district” So the sentence reads: “To confirm in writing our unequivocal support for a new era of clean energy production in the district by writing a letter to:”
- In the list of letter recipients: - In place of the words “Andrew Bowie MP, Minister for Nuclear and Networks”, add “Minister of State (Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero)”
- In the sentence “That all members of the Cabinet, at every possible opportunity, actively promote Dungeness as a location for new nuclear power generation.”
- In place of the words “all members of the cabinet”, add the words “this council”
- In place of the words “promote Dungeness as a location for new nuclear power generation.”, add the words “promotes the district as a location for clean energy generation.” So the sentence reads: “That this council, at every possible opportunity, actively promotes the district as a location for clean energy generation.”

(Voting figures: 21 for, 6 against, 0 abstentions).

The amendment was therefore won and became the substantive motion.

During the consideration of the amendment, the meeting was adjourned for a five minute period.

Proposed by Councillor J Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Scoffham; and

RESOLVED:

1. To confirm in writing our unequivocal support for a new era of clean energy production in the district by writing a letter to:
 - a. The Minister of State (Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero)
 - b. Roger Gough, Leader Kent County Council
 - c. Damian Collins OBE MP, Member of Parliament for Folkestone and Hythe
2. That this council, at every possible opportunity, actively promotes the district as a location for clean energy generation.

(Voting figures: 21 for, 6 against, 0 abstentions).

2. From Councillor Dr Stephen Scoffham, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity, on behalf of the Green Group

Councillor Scoffham introduced his motion which sought support for the Kent AONB unit in promoting its bid for a UNESCO Global Cross Channel Geopark.

Proposed by Councillor Scoffham,
Seconded by Councillor M Blakemore; and

RESOLVED:

That, as far as existing resources allow:

- To support the Kent Downs AONB Unit in promoting the bid, working with other organisations and Local Authorities in Kent
- To raise public awareness about the bid and the benefits it will bring to the local community and natural environment
- To include reference to the Cross Channel Global Geopark in our communications and promotional activities
- To assist the Kent Downs AONB Unit in reaching out to school children, students, and young people to help shape the bid and, if successful, on any projects that follow
- To contribute towards identifying Geosites in the Folkestone-Hythe district
- To further the development of the Cross Channel Global Geopark through the positive deployment of appropriate Council functions, resources, and responsibilities.

(Voting figures: 27 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

3. From Councillor McConville, Leader of the Labour Group

Councillor McConville introduced his motion which raised concerns around KCC's decision to stop providing accommodation for care leavers over the age of 19.

During the consideration of this item, Councillor Keen made a declaration of interest as she worked for Kent County Council. She left the Chamber while the matter was debated, and returned after the vote had taken place.

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor M Blakemore; and

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Leader of the Council write to Kent County Council asking for an immediate suspension of Decision 23-00083.
- b) That this item be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to allow members, working with officers, to find a suitable path forward in service provision from April 2024.

(Voting figures: 27 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

4. From Councillor Davison, Deputy Leader of the Labour Group

Councillor Davison outlined her motion which sought a review of the council's procurement plan, to make it more progressive.

Proposed by Councillor Davison,
Seconded by Councillor Speakman; and

RESOLVED:

- To refer to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the council's procurement plan, with specific reference to section 5 in the action plan, Local Suppliers and SME participation, which is to be reviewed quarterly.
- To explore further Progressive Procurement practises which are designed to encourage more local businesses to engage with our procurement process.
- That a reviewed policy should highlight not only the financial cost of projects, but also the economic benefits of localised procurement and investing capital within our own district. As well as ensuring value for money, not only for our community but also in partnership with them.
- That any revised policy be decided by committee after May 2024.

(Voting figure: 26 for, 0 against, 1 abstentions).

61. Report to Council on decisions made in accordance with the constitution's call-in and urgency rule

The constitution provides that, when an urgent decision is made by the Cabinet or Cabinet Member, for which any delay in implementation, likely to be caused by the call-in process, would seriously prejudice the Council's or public interest, then the 'Call-in Rules of Procedure', Part 6.3, rules 1-6 do not apply. Decisions, taken as a matter of urgency, must be reported to the next available meeting of the Council, together with the reasons for urgency.

Proposed by Councillor Holgate,
Seconded by Councillor Prater; and

RESOLVED:

That report A/23/16 be received and noted.

(Voting figures: 27 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

62. Extension of term of independent persons under the Localism Act 2011

The report set out the Audit and Governance Committee recommendations on the extension of the appointment of Chris Harman, David Carter and Ken London as the Independent Members under s28(7) of the Localism Act 2011.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor Cooper; and

RESOLVED:

1. That report A/23/18 be received and noted.
2. That the term of Chris Harman, David Carter and Ken London as the Independent Persons be extended under s28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 for a further term of four years.

(Voting figures: 27 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

63. Committee Membership Changes

Under the Folkestone and Hythe District Council Constitution, Part 8.1 'Delegation to Officers', paragraph 3.18, the Head of Paid Service is authorised to make appointments to committees or sub-committees at the request of the relevant political group leader. The report sets out the appointments made, under these powers, on the instruction of the Leader of the Green Group.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor P Blakemore; and

RESOLVED:

1. That report A/23/17 be received and noted.

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).