

Leader's Q&A session

Held at: Remote meeting.

Date: Wednesday, 29 July 2020

1. Questions from the public

Public questions:

1. From Mr and Mrs R and E Jarvis to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

The town public toilets - Folkestone and Hythe have closed this vital human need. Could these places please consider a coin or card operated "tardis" style that self-clean once used?

Car parks have a mobile phone or "app" payment:
Guildhall Street. Tontine Street. The Leas West End. Harbour/Sunny sands?

ANSWER

Thank you Mr and Mrs Jarvis for your question. I will answer this question in Councillor Peall's absence.

The toilets in the district were only closed following government guidance to protect the health of our residents during the Covid-19 lock down period. As soon as we were able the toilets were reopened with extra staff and an enhanced cleaning regime.

With regards to card operated self-cleaning toilets, we are not aware of anywhere in the UK where these are available. I am sure they would require a significant capital investment and more importantly the council believes that all of our toilets should be free for our residents and visitors.

2. From Mr Peter Rogers to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

It has been highlighted by the council that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to enforce the 2 hour parking restrictions on Radnor Cliff and Radnor Crescent.

1. Why should the residents pay for a permit?
2. The Council should repay ALL the payments to the residents since the scheme was introduced.

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Rogers for your question.

The 2 hour waiting restrictions in Radnor Cliff and Radnor Cliff Crescent are being enforced daily by officers. Our records show from the 1st June-16th July this year, 1098 non-permit holder vehicles have been logged. The vast majority of vehicles logged were in compliance of the waiting restriction. Only 26 penalty charge notices were issued during this period.

The expectation of many residents is that immediate enforcement action is taken on vehicles deemed to belong to non-permit holders. This is not possible as by definition, parking is allowed for two hours plus an additional 10 minutes stipulated in the regulations. Officers must have logged the vehicles, and then return after 2 hours and 10 minutes before a penalty charge can be issued. Due to the increasing number of vehicles in the area that officers have to deal with, it is perfectly possible for a vehicle to have already been parked for a length of time before it is logged.

In residential areas where demand for parking is high, and swift enforcement action is required, 'permit holders only' parking is usually recommended. However the result of the recent consultation relating to Radnor Cliff and Cliff Crescent determined that the majority of the residents are not supportive of a 'permit holders only' scheme, and they are happy to keep this 2 hour limit. Officers will continue to patrol and enforce the 2 hour limit as best as possible.

3. From Ms C Abbott to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

How can the Council justify a pay rise of £40 k to the Chief Executive in these exceptional economic downturn times?

ANSWER:

Thank you Ms Abbott for your question.

On 13th June 2019, a report was presented to the Personnel Committee as an exempt item as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 – 'information relating to any individual'.

The report entitled 'senior management pay and grading' presented to members of the committee a review of the council's current pay and grading arrangements along with a proposal to ensure that the council is

positioned to remain competitive in attracting and retaining talented officers now and in future years.

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken by South East Employers looking at senior manager salaries across councils in the south east region. The wider area was chosen for the review, rather than the immediate local area, as should we be in a position to recruit externally for any senior roles it is entirely feasible that we would be seeking to attract candidates from across the wider area and therefore needed to be able to position ourselves competitively with our pay and reward package which was last reviewed in 2015. The comparator councils were either district or borough councils in East & West Sussex, Hampshire, Kent and Surrey.

Members of the Committee voted unanimously to adopt new pay scales for both the Directors and the Chief Executive, effective from 14th June 2020.

Whilst this did increase the annual salary paid to the Chief Executive it was not a £40,000 increase as is being referred to in this question, which I am presuming has come from the public inspection of the statutory accounts for 2019/2020.

The total remuneration including pension contributions column under section 15 (page 52) of the accounts does show a difference of £40,490 between the £125,479 paid in 2018/2019 and £165,969 paid in 2019/2020.

However, it should be noted that the Chief Executive also receives remuneration for acting as the Returning Officer for any elections held locally, regionally or nationally. During 2019/2020 there was a district & parish election, EU election and a general election. The remuneration for these 3 elections is also included in the quoted figures.

4. From Mrs R Severn (Litter Picking Watch) to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

We are a volunteer charity group who remove so much litter from our streets and countryside in Kent. Despite this FHDC will not allow us any bags for litter picking.

We used to have them but they were stopped. I would like to know why this is, as we are doing a volunteer service for the FHDC by collecting the waste. Other county councils gladly supply their litter pickers with bags.

We are organised, health and safety aware at all times, risk assessments are carried out before doing any area, hi viz is worn and signs put out.

As head of FHDC can you tell us why bags are not available to us and what are you able to do to change this for us and resolve this problem?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question. In Councillor Peall's absence, I will answer this question on his behalf.

The Council is always keen to support community litter picks and appreciates the efforts of the many volunteers who regularly get involved in these activities. Last year, the Council supported 81 separate events equating to 2820 volunteer hours. We supported Community Litter Picks by providing litter pickers, bags, staff via the Area Officers and publicising events. Community Litter Picks are beneficial as they often take place on recreational land or land away from the regular cleansing routes.

When organising events we do request volunteers check they firstly have the permission of the landowner and that they act safely at all times. For this reason we discourage groups from working on or near fast roads.

If Mrs Severn is able to give details of her group and where they plan to work then the council can look at what support can be offered.

5. From Ms M Burgon-Miller to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Why am I, and my neighbours carefully sorting all the recyclable rubbish into separate bins? Every week when the collectors come from Veolia, the men just tip all the newspapers into the bins containing plastic and metal waste. All the operatives do the same thing and it has happened now for more than a year. It is pointless for the public to follow the guidelines when the collectors don't seem to care and consistently mix it all into one container. Perhaps an undercover view of these practices would reveal the extent of this charade.

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, which I will respond to in place of Councillor Peall who is unable to join us tonight. We occasionally get comments from residents about refuse crews mixing loads. This often relates to the use of loading bins attached to the rear of the vehicle, which can give impression that loads are being mixed. I can reassure Mrs Burgon-Miller that the quality of recycle material is monitored when each load is tipped at the waste transfer station. If crews were persistently mixing recycling materials then we would expect it to have been identified.

Improving local recycling rates is an important objective for the council and if Mrs Burgon-Miller is able to give any more information and confirm her address we will certainly investigate further.

6. From Ms C Cooper to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

What will happen to the Community Hubs after the end of July and how will vulnerable older people on the Romney Marsh access help with collecting prescriptions and shopping?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Ms Cooper.

The future of the community hubs was the subject of a report that was heard at a Cabinet meeting on 22nd July 2020. This talks about the council involvement in the Community Hubs and sets out an action plan to achieve this.

Fundamental to the Council's future role is to transition Hubs out of the emergency response to a sustainable, community developed and led approach based on local need.

Cabinet agreed the recommendations which included support for the ongoing volunteering effort and partnership working to enable the hubs for example to signpost people to appropriate sources of help. Our Health, Wellbeing & Partnerships Senior Specialist has been working with the Hubs on external funding and the positive progress re Sport England bids. The Magnox grant to New Romney and earlier grants accessed by Hythe/Age UK demonstrate that funding is available i.e. there are definitely grant funding opportunities to support the move to a self-sustaining model.

In the meantime the government has ended support to the shielded population. This means people can carry on doing their own shopping and collecting prescriptions as they did before lockdown. If for any reason they are required to self-isolate and need help, the hubs still have volunteers attached to them and can still carry out support. The Hubs and the district council's dedicated Covid-19 telephone line can signpost residents to appropriate agencies as required.

Pharmacies can now sort out prescription deliveries so residents requiring this service are encouraged to contact their pharmacy.

The government advice on how vulnerable populations will be supported is changing constantly and the council will keep an eye on this and provide updates as appropriate.

7. From Ms I Yerburgh to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Given that on 11/12 July there were several lit BBQs in the Lower Leas Coastal Park, and the one park warden stated that he had no powers to intervene, who has the authority and responsibility to issue fines for any anti-social misdemeanours in the park?

ANSWER:

Thank you Miss Yerburgh for your question.

Throughout the lockdown period, we have increased the number of officers on patrol within the district, including Enforcement, Environmental Protection and Community Safety Officers and we have been very proactive in covering the Coastal Park, talking to visitors on entry to the park by car and foot, to explain the new rules around no BBQs on site. It's a shame we had to introduce it, but it had been abused. Where some people have gained access and still had BBQs, they have been advised to put them out or take them to the beach or other areas for enjoyment. We have been working to clear areas of the Coastal Park that allow visitors to hide within wild growing areas of the park and these have been cut back to allow a better visual aid to officers who can engage before the BBQs get lit and Community Protection Warnings have also been served against those offenders who have been caught. Whilst the wardens do not have any powers to stop the use of BBQs, they have been given the officers' contact numbers so they can call an officer for help if the visitor does not engage with the Warden, allowing an Enforcement Officer or Community Safety Officer to issue the warnings accordingly.

8. From Mr M Hamilton to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

Under your leadership we have seen huge investment in land and property including the gas works site, Debenhams and Westenhanger Castle.

The spend is in excess of £5.5 million.

Yet East Folkestone is one of the most deprived areas in the South East and now Covid has exaggerated this.

What plans have you to regenerate East Folkestone and over what time scale?

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Hamilton for the question.

The council will be bringing forward a COVID recovery plan for the district and central themes of this will be support for communities and the local economy. This will build on the council's investment in key sites and initiatives in the town centre, as well as working with stakeholders from both the private and public sectors to increase their investment. This will lead to more opportunities for local residents, including those in East Folkestone, to gain employment and support businesses in the area to grow.

A significant programme that is underway to support economic inclusion is the Folkestone Community Works programme. This is a result of the Council's successful bid for European Structural and Investment Funds Growth programme 2014 – 2020 and is one of only three in the South East. The programme covers the wards of East Folkestone, Central, Harbour and part of Broadmead, and the areas of highest deprivation are the priority. The programme will bring £4.9million investment into the local community and is scheduled to run until December 2022.

The programme is currently funding projects that are helping residents who are unemployed and economically inactive on their journey back into the work. Almost £520,000 ESF funds have been invested in two projects and over one hundred residents have engaged with the provision so far. By the end of the programme, just under £1 million ESF funds will be used to help over a thousand residents improve their employability.

There is also a focus on strengthening the businesses based in the area, which will lead to more jobs that residents can access. One project is delivering business support through 1-2-1 mentoring and workshops to help businesses, including sole traders, start-ups and potential entrepreneurs, to establish and grow. A second involves the refurbishment of an empty building in Bouverie Place to create a business centre, which will support around 24 small business and business start-ups employing potentially 60 employees. There is also a grant scheme for SME businesses in the programme area and a diverse range of businesses have benefited from these including a bakery, designer, hair dressers, laundry to an engineering company. By the end of the programme, some £1.5 million ERDF will have been brought into the area to economic growth in this deprived area of Folkestone.

9. From Ms J Spain to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

When will the work start on the café development beside the lower Leas lift and how are local disabled people of all ages or elderly residents who live here all year round and who do not have their own transport ,going to be able to access this facility once completed? The disabled of all ages and elderly have no Councillor that I am aware of, to monitor services which are vital to their physical/ mental wellbeing and inclusion and as such, the council appears to contravene the DDA.

ANSWER:

Thank you Ms Spain for your question.

The Leas lift is not in the ownership or operated by the district council. The Folkestone Leas Lift Community Interest Company was set up to raise funds to renovate and reopen the lift and continues to work with this

aim. I would suggest contacting them directly regarding your questions and concerns about the lift.

As the portfolio holder for Communities, I do have an interest in these issues, and am grateful to Ms Spain for raising this issue with the council.

10. From Ms J Darling to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

"Levelling up" has featured prominently in Conservative Party policy proposals. Inequalities in our country have been further exposed during the pandemic.

These inequalities are embodied by the differences in the prospects and resources of the residents of our borough.

What are the council's plans to alleviate this unacceptably immoral, divisive and disabling situation?

ANSWER:

Thank you Ms Darling for your question.

The council is committed to delivering more affordable homes for rent and shared ownership purchase across the district including in the rural areas of the district to meet the housing needs of the community. This will include homes delivered directly by the council through our new build and acquisition programme and homes delivered by our Housing Associations. The council itself has committed to deliver 300 council homes over the 10 year period 2015/16-2025/26. It will also deliver a further 1000 council homes over the 10 year period 2025/26-2035/36.

The Council works alongside stakeholders such as the health sector and KCC on key strategic plans and partnerships and supports a variety of projects that help address inequalities. Examples of activities include addressing holiday hunger by supporting provision of meals through programmes such as the fit and fed hunger project run at The Three Hills Sports centre for large groups of children and at Folkestone sports centre for specific cohorts of young people referred in by Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) at schools. The Covid -19 response to help vulnerable people is another example of helping the community with access to free food parcels etc. The question is very wide and covers a range of strategic functions including population health work. The health sector is reconfiguring itself and the council works alongside some of these to address issues such as smoking cessation, healthy eating on low budgets, mental health and substance misuse as well as wider issues such as addressing inactive lifestyles (a subject very much in the news recently).

The council acts independently and in partnership with a wide range of institutions, such as Folkestone College and the voluntary sector, to increase opportunities for local people to develop new skills and improve employability.

I mentioned earlier the £5m Folkestone Community Works programme. Over 100 residents have accessed support to go into either appropriate education/ training to improve their skills or employment. By the end of the programme, with match funding, the programme will spend some £1.9m helping over a thousand residents on their journey into work. The programme also supports businesses in the area to create more employment opportunities locally through business development grants, business advice and providing new business space by converting an empty building in Bouverie Place to provide accommodation for 24 small businesses and 60 jobs that will also support the regeneration of the town centre.

The Romney Marsh Partnership (RMP) brings together a number of organisations to develop and deliver a socio-economic plan to mitigate the impact of the closure of Dungeness A nuclear power station. The RMP brings together providers such as the Romney Resource Centre, Marsh Academy, East Kent College (Ashford and Folkestone Colleges) and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to develop new skills development opportunities such as construction skills training; apprenticeships; and has plans for a new lifelong learning skills centre in collaboration with Romney Resource Centre. The RMP is now proposing to seek funding from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority for projects on Romney Marsh to support levelling up under five main themes of: quality jobs; support for our local businesses; improving skills and training; improving infrastructure; and accessibility. projects including creating a community transport link from the Marsh to Appledore railway station so residents can better access education and work in Ashford or Hastings. Proposals are also in place to create more local employment opportunities through the construction of business workspace for growing enterprises at Mountfield Road Industrial Estate, New Romney.

Consequently, the council has been involved in 'levelling up' for some time across the district and this continues to be the case.

11. From Ms H Jones to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Since the Pride flag was not flown during June, despite a democratic vote, will the council arrange mandatory LGBTQ+ training as a matter of urgency for all councillors so that they may represent their marginalised constituents more fully.

ANSWER:

Thank you Ms Jones for your question.

I believe this is a matter relating to Hythe Town Council. Therefore, this question should be addressed to them as training for town councillors is a matter for the town council to organise. We do in our own council address this subject.

2. Questions from Councillors

Councillor questions

1. From Councillor Meyers to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Will this council support the calls for a statue to be erected in the honour & memory of Dame Vera Lynn, preferably on the white cliffs of Dover and hopefully on or close to the Battle of Britain memorial?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The council would support the principle of the Dame Vera Lynn statue being erected but it is a matter for Dover District Council to decide as her association is more strongly aligned with Dover and the locations mentioned above sit within Dover district ownership.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Would the council be prepared to support the cost of such a call with an appropriately budgeted sum?

ANSWER:

I cannot answer directly for the Council, it would be a council decision, but I hope they would.

2. From Councillor Treloar to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

In a month where the Folkestone Pride march would have otherwise taken place, will you as leader, on behalf of the district council, please provide a statement of support for our LGBTQIA+ community, including a broad condemnation of any act that undermines the fairness, equality and compassion that the community deserves?

ANSWER:

The Leader handed over to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee to answer the question.

Thank you for your question. The Leader has asked that I respond, as this falls within my portfolio. All council policies undergo Equality Impact Assessments and we support members of all minority communities equally.

The council is involved in IPAG (Independent Police Advisory Group) where members from the LGBTQIA community are representatives and can raise any matters of concern.

Details of IPAG can be found below.

<https://www.kent.police.uk/police-forces/kent-police/areas/kent-police/about-us/about-us/ipag/who-we-are/>

In addition we work closely across communities through the community safety unit (CSU) and any act causing concern around alarm or harassment can be addressed through the CSU.

All Pride events nationally have been impacted by Covid-19, however the LGBTQIA+ community have been able to access national online support in lieu of celebrations.

The Leader then added that the council had supported Pride by changing their logo to pride colours, and had provided support at events previously.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

3. From Councillor Prater to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

A number of other councils are looking at merging district and county councils into large unitary authorities. For example, in Surrey there is a proposal to scrap the county council and all the district/borough councils and replace them with a single 'unitary authority' for all of Surrey covering over 1.2 million voters, starting in 2022.

Although there are hugely increased financial pressures on councils due to Covid, it should be for Government to help support councils through that shortfall, not use it as a way of forcing through council mergers.

Many feel that a Unitary authority covering Kent would be massively too big and remote from local people.

What is the Leader's view on a single Kent Unitary authority?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Prater for your question.

Even excluding the Medway unitary authority, I am aware that many consider a single unitary council for the whole of Kent to be too large and unworkable, covering as it would do some 1,370 square miles and almost 1,582,000 people, the largest population of all the English counties. I concur with that view. There is an expected White Paper on local recovery and devolution coming from Government in the autumn of this year and we will see what requirements are laid out in that document.

I have long advocated that Kent be split into three unitarys with an overarching authority. I think this would satisfy all the government rules and be workable sizes.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Have you, the Chief Executive and other officers have had any discussions, formal or informal, with counterparts at other Kent Councils this year relating to any possible Council mergers in the County, either as one single county unitary or smaller unitary areas?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Prater for your supplementary question. You will not be surprised to learn that informal conversations have started with Kent Leaders and senior council officials with their counter-parts across Kent and as part of the District Council Network (DCN), but until such time that the White Paper is published such discussions are by their nature very limited in scope.

4. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

I have been asked by a number of residents when will the business plan of Otterpool Park be in the public domain. They are aware that the council are planning the development and that the district now owns a racecourse and a castle but as rate payers of the district they feel that they are being kept in the dark and would like to be informed as to what benefits this development will have for residents and how the loan of 100 million that has been borrowed by F&HDC will be paid back.

ANSWER:

Thank you for the question. I regret that the constituents of the member feel they are being kept in the dark. I do not consider that residents have been kept in the dark. The dedicated website for Otterpool Park, www.otterpoolpark.org has extensive information on the project, the planning documents are available on the planning portal on the Council's web-site which similarly contain large amounts of information and there have been and will continue to be public exhibitions and presentations and regular meetings are held with representatives of parish councils.

Specifically the business plan is currently being drawn up. The intention is that Cabinet will consider the final proposals for the business plan in December. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have the opportunity to consider the draft before it is placed before Cabinet. There will be certain elements of the business plan that will be, of necessity, commercially confidential and consequentially consideration of the business plan will, subject to member decision, be held in private.

Once the business plan has been approved the non – confidential elements will be in the public domain. In general terms this will show the returns on the Council's investment.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

On page 16 of the FHDC draft accounts, the accounts seem to indicate that FHDC have borrowed £50.4 million to finance their capital programme in 19/20, but page 67 of the document shows that the total borrowing is over £90 million, and that was at 31 March 2020, and mainly from the PWLB?

ANSWER:

Had you given me advance notice of this question, I would have been able to give you a specific answer. As it is, I will have to provide a written answer at a later date.

5. From Councillor Keutenius to Councillor Whybrow, Cabinet Member for the Environment

Black Bull Rd has the worst air quality in the district according to a report from July 2019. What actions have been taken over the past 12 months to reduce the amount of NO2 affecting the residents of Black Bull Rd and the pupils of Mundella Primary School?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question which is a very important one.

The Councils 2020 air quality annual status report has recently been accepted by DEFRA last week and it has confirmed that the Council are continuing to meet its air quality objectives, as set out by the government. The report should be on our website within a matter of days.

Therefore no air quality management areas are required to be declared within the district and we will continue to monitor the air quality within the area to ensure we continue to meet the objectives.

The 2020 report shows a reading for DT5 Blackbull Road of 27.9 microgrammes per cubic metre compared to 29.7 in the previous year so there has been some reduction. Both readings are below the objective of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre.

We are currently working on our Carbon Action Plan with the aim of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Measures to be included in this Plan should also lead to an improvement in air quality. The Environment is also a key theme in our Covid Recovery Plan.

The main source of air pollution in the district is from transport. KCC is the highway authority and they are just about to publish their Energy and Low Emissions Strategy which includes strategies for tackling air pollution. I will ensure your concerns are passed on to county colleagues.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

6. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

As it has been reported on the news that land has been procured near Ashford to be use as a clearance area for 4000 lorries, (which would appear to be 2000 spaces short which means again Operation Stack or Brock as it is now called will have to be implemented), for use once the Brexit negotiations have concluded on December 31st 2020 and the proposed re-opening of Manston Airport as an airfreight hub. Does the leader have any information about our District and East Kent becoming a Free Port area and if so what does he believe the pros and cons to our residents could be?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question. Quite simply, this would undoubtedly give employment for the area, but we are not there yet.

A consultation seeking views on the Government's proposal to establish 10 Freeports across the UK closed on 13th July 2020. The Leaders of East Kent authorities were very much part of the discussion ahead of the consultation deadline, and a virtual Freeport Consultation Focus Group Meeting was hosted by the Port of Dover on 2 July 2020 that was attended by the East Kent Leaders. There is shared endorsement amongst East Kent Leaders of the consultation response prepared by the Port of Dover, which proposes that the Port of Dover is to provide the basis for a Multi-site Freeport model to deliver transformative benefits for the wider UK economy (noting that the port is central for the supply chains for major manufacturers across the UK), as well as Kent.

A Multi-site Freeport model would not be geographically limited, ensuring benefits can be spread across regions, and to deliver immediate benefits for existing businesses, supporting post-COVID economic recovery as well as driving regeneration.

If selected by Government, the Multi-site Freeport proposal, led by the Port of Dover, would bring new investment in infrastructure, economic growth opportunities and environmental benefits for the whole of Kent.

As the allocation of Freeports is to be carried out through a competitive bidding process, there is no certainty at this time that Port of Dover is to be one of the 10 selected Freeport locations.

The Government's original aim was to have selected the Freeports by the end of 2020, with a view to their being operational by 2021. This timeframe now looks likely to be somewhat delayed, but a revised timeline has not yet been communicated. An update to members can be circulated once a further Government announcement has been made in due course.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

7. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

The council has, in the past, supported local events as part of Black History Month. Given current events surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, are there any plans to support similar projects this October?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Councillor Davison.

As the Folkestone & Hythe Community Safety Partnership we actively support and promote any local projects in our district, whilst reaching out to our partners and contacts through the Community Safety Unit to do the same.

Our communications team also helps to promote local not-for-profit events which bring all of our communities together.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

In the spirit of an earlier question, would you support a lasting tribute to Folkestone born Black officer and footballer Walter Tull?

ANSWER:

This is a matter for officer/Cabinet discussion. That isn't to say we wouldn't consider this, and we are happy to discuss this with you.

8. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Prater, Cabinet Member for Revenues, Benefits, Anti-Fraud and Corruption

Can you please tell me how many people have approached the council since the start of lockdown on March 23rd who are struggling to pay their council tax and require support?

ANSWER:

Thanks Connor for the question.

From 23rd March to the end of June 2020 the Council processed 2,266 new claims for Council Tax Reduction, an increase of 1,301 from the same period last year.

From 23rd March to the end of June 2020 the Council also received 257 applications for further support through the Council's Financial Support Payment scheme. This is an increase of 74 over the same period last year. Of these applications 189 received support.

A considerable number of residents also made contact and have had instalments deferred.

The council's Welfare Team have also been proactive in directly contacting vulnerable customers to discuss available support.

The Council also put out repeated messages on our website, in the press, on Facebook and Twitter asking residents with concerns about their Council Tax to check the website at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/financial-support> or call the Council, plus a letter to every household in arrears of over £100. We want to help.

Finally, I'd like to thank every member of the Revenues and Benefits team for their work to support all residents that need it, even from home and with a greatly increased workload.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I was expecting high numbers, but that is a lot. Good to see the team is working well with this. At the start of lockdown, the council received a funding package of just over £1 million. Has that allocation been spent, or is there any funding left?

ANSWER:

The huge majority has been spent, most of it has been allocated for the remainder of the year, but I will provide you with those numbers.

Following on from the meeting, Councillor Prater provided the following response:

The Council was allocated £1,132,732 to be used by 31 March 2021. As at the end of July 2020 £962,897 of this had been allocated. £169,835 is currently left which is to be used for new Council Tax Reduction received for the rest of the year. The Council will ensure that the full funding is utilised by the end of the financial year.

9. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

What are the tangible measurements that the council use to determine that The Coastal Park is being managed in line with the charitable aims and objectives, these specify the park is for the use of residents of the district?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

As part of the council's Management Plan for the Coastal Park, the following objectives were set;

- Serve as a very high quality attractive open space with a wide and inclusive appeal.
- Be a major venue for events and art.
- Actively compliment other regeneration in projects in the town and district and not be seen as an isolated site.
- Successfully integrate its coastal defence role with its main role as a public park.
- Respond to changing demands of users where practicable.
- Be managed in an environmentally sustainable way.
- Maintain environmental quality and heritage value.

One of the key metrics for gauging successful adherence to these objectives is through the retention of the Green Flag Award, but also through valued feedback of local residents.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

10. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

Given the changes announced to local planning law, which will come into effect in September, has the council submitted any formal correspondence with Robert Jenrick MP Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, either directly or through the LGA?

ANSWER:

Thanks for your question Councillor McConville.

The council has not engaged directly with the Secretary of State but I am sure that the Local Government Association, along with other bodies such as the Royal Town Planning Institute, will have. The council will apply the new regulations as required and that will include planning and licensing. I would hope that the Bill will encourage investment and appropriate levels of development across the district to stimulate economic growth as we move into the COVID recovery phase.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The regulations make it easier for people to obtain planning, and the length of time that these requests are turned around in is reducing too. I'm concerned about the additional workload on the planning team.

ANSWER:

The planning department will continue to be 'up to scratch'.

11. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

The old Debenhams store was bought quite some time ago by District Council and any news of public consultation as to its proposed future use seems to have gone quiet. Could the leader please give us an update and timings regarding this going forward?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The council is working with a range of organisations on plans to redevelop the building and ensure it plays a role in the future of the town centre. I trust you will appreciate that COVID has had an impact in the timing for this but the town centre will be a key part of our recovery plans.

We will come forward with the propositions as fast as we can.

As part of continuing to engage with residents we will be launching a competition to rename the building. I believe this will be an important and positive step forward for this key site.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Obviously we are looking at the larger redevelopment. Is there some sort of consultation we can go forward with relating to its temporary use, while it's sitting there empty?

ANSWER:

I am looking to see if we can bring something forward for interim use, and will go to consultation on that. I will stress 'interim use' as it is important that the purchase brings a return. As soon as I can come out with some information, I will.