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FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 21 July 2021

Present: Councillors Miss Susan Carey, John Collier, Laura Davison, Ray Field, Gary Fuller, Peter Gane, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Anthony Hills (Vice-Chair), Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Nicola Keen, Michelle Keutenius, Jim Martin, Philip Martin (Chairman), Connor McConville, Jackie Meade, Ian Meyers, David Monk, Terence Mullard, Stuart Peall, Tim Prater, Patricia Rolfe, Rebecca Shoob, Georgina Treloar, Lesley Whybrow, David Wimble and John Wing

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Mrs Ann Berry and Douglas Wade

12. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

13. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 February, 16 September, 21 October and 25 November 2020, and 24 February 2021 were submitted, approved, and signed by the Chairman.

14. Chairman's Communications

The Chairman gave the following communications:

“Since the easing of some of the COVID restrictions, I have visited a number of businesses in the Folkestone area, to see how they have been coping during such difficult times. I have been pleased and well assured that they all appreciated the funding received through both local and central Government grants etc.

I attended the Canada Day Memorial service, at the invitation of the Folkestone Town Council Mayor where I met several veterans and British legion members.

I was also pleased to be at the Armed forces day raising of the flag ceremony at the Civic Centre.

I was invited to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Kent Coast Electrification and had an enjoyable trip on the train to Sandwich where I learned a great deal about railway history, which I wouldn't have had an opportunity to do otherwise.

Included in other recent events was the Normandy landings anniversary at Folkestone Memorial Gardens”.

15. Petitions

There were no petitions to be presented.

16. Questions from the Public

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

17. Questions from Councillors

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

18. Announcements of the Leader of the Council

The Leader gave the following announcements:

“Thank you Chairman, and good evening to you all.

It is nice to be meeting in person again.

You, like me, will be appalled at the deterioration of the waste service and I can only echo Councillor Peall’s apology to all of our residents that have been affected and assure you and them that we are doing everything that we can to try and resolve the situation. Unfortunately, just as we thought that things were going to improve, self-isolation among Veolia’s staff increased dramatically, and that, along with the country wide driver shortage means that we have had to suspend the garden waste collection service to give priority to the main household collection streams. Not a situation that we want to be in, so we will have to continue to try to find solutions as quickly as we can. I thank Councillor Jim Martin for his support.

On a lighter front, I am happy to report that our Revenues and Benefits teams have been short listed in 4 out of the 5 categories for the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Awards (IRRV), wonderful recognition of the sterling work they have done, and continue to do.

Another piece of good news is that we have achieved the Gold Award under the Armed Forces Covenant Scheme. Well done to the team.

Also, the Triennial is due to start on 22 July, and will be extended until 2 November, to bring business to schools. There is some interesting art work on display.

Finally, the NHS have announced that this coming Saturday, from 10am, the Folca vaccination centre will be open for anyone over 18 to drop in to get either their first or second jab. I will ask you to pass this information on, especially to our younger adults.

Councillor McConville, on behalf of the opposition, responded to the Leader’s announcements and advised that he echoed the Leader’s feelings on the Veolia situation. He suggested that more proactive communications would be helpful for residents. Information should be available on the council’s website, ensuring

honesty and openness. Residents would then be more understanding. He looked forward to the Task and Finish meeting scheduled for Monday. He echoed the Leader's congratulations to the Revenues and Benefits Team, and the praised the success in the Armed Forces Covenant Scheme. He then advised he had now received his second jab. He added that Folca were also offering a drop in for second vaccinations on this coming Friday (23 July).

The Leader then replied that he agreed with regard to the point on communications, but he added that it was a fast moving situation, and communications could quickly become out of date.

Proposed by Councillor Monk,
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee; and

RESOLVED:

That the announcements of the Leader be noted.

19. Opposition Business

The Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor McConville, set out his Opposition Business which asked the council to address fly tipping across the district by means of amending the Bulky Waste Collection Scheme.

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Keen; and

RESOLVED:

That Option (b) (refer the issue to Cabinet, for their observations before deciding whether to make a decision on the issue) be agreed for the business below.

To request that cabinet consider a report that looks to address fly tipping across the district by means of amending the Bulky Waste Collection Scheme. This report should consider a number of options weighed against allocation of resources. These options should include:

- A minimum of 1 free collection per year for households in receipt of
- Council tax support
- Housing benefit
- Income related job seekers allowance
- Pension credit (guaranteed rate)
- Income support
- Universal credit (the housing element)
- A reduced rate for additional collections (capped per year) for those in receipt of the support schemes listed previous.
- Improved signposting on the council website to other organisations that may be able to help residents remove unwanted household items.

- Consider the appropriateness of the current pricing structure of the bulky waste collection as compared to other neighbouring authorities.

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

20. **Motions on Notice**

There were no motions on notice at the meeting.

21. **Pay policy statement 2021/22**

The report considered the recommendation from the Personnel Committee and presented an updated pay policy statement for 2021/22 for approval.

Proposed by Councillor Monk,
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee; and

RESOLVED:

1. **That report A/21/08 be received and noted.**
2. **That the recommendations of the Personnel Committee be approved.**
3. **That the updated Pay Policy Statement appended to the report for 2021/22 be approved under S38(1) of the Localism Act 2011.**

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

22. **Report to Council on a key decision made in accordance with the constitution's call-in and urgency rule**

The constitution provides that, when an urgent key decision is made by the Cabinet, 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. Key decisions, taken as a matter of urgency, must be reported to the next available meeting of the Council, together with the reasons for urgency.

As part of the debate, Councillor Monk gave his answer to Councillor question 15, as the time limit had expired during the Councillor Questions item.

Proposed by Councillor Monk,
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee;

RESOLVED:

That report A/21/09 be received and noted.

(Voting figures: 29 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

23. **Report from the Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' Allowances and Expenses**

The report recommended the proposals from the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel with the comments of the Governance Working Group that the Members' Allowance Scheme of Folkestone and Hythe District Council be amended.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor Godfrey; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/21/10 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and the views of the Governance Working Group as set out in paragraph 2.3 (a) - (h) of the report be noted, and that the Members' Allowance Scheme be amended to adopt the views of the Working Group as set out in bold in paragraph 2.3 (a) – (h) of the report**
- 3. That the amendments come into effect on 22 July 2021.**
- 4. That the Parental Leave Policy as set out in Appendix 2 be adopted.**

(Voting figures: 29 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

24. Romney Marsh Coastal Destination including Beach Chalet Project

The report sought Full Council approval for additional funding to deliver the Cabinet approved proposal of the Romney Marsh Coastal Destination including beach Chalet project. The project will deliver new beach huts, toilet facilities including a changing places toilet, a concession/café, upgraded car parking facilities and public realm improvements that will link with New Romney Town Councils "The Green" area to create a true visitor destination.

Proposed by Councillor Collier,
Seconded by Councillor Wimble;

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/21/11 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the recommendations of Cabinet Report C/21/13 (Attached as appendix 4 of the report) be noted. .**
- 3. That additional borrowing of £518k to be added to the Council's Capital Programme.**

(Voting figures: 20 for, 0 against, 7 abstentions).

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Council – 21 July 2021

Public Questions

1. ~~From Ms S Batchelor to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects~~

~~There is not enough affordable and social housing available now. As future generations of local workers won't be able to afford to buy or even rent property in the district. What assurance can the councillor give that those individuals won't be forced to seek jobs and affordable homes many miles away from their home town, isolated from their families and friends?~~

As the questioner was not present at the meeting, the above question fell (as per part 4 of the Constitution, paragraph 8.7).

2. From Mrs M Lawes to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

Due to the lack of house building over last 30/40 years by FHDC, the fact that London Councils, KCC renting properties through Clear Springs, Police, Probation service and other local authorities have had residents housed in East Folkestone and Harbour Ward, that young people with mental health are being housed in sheltered accommodation for 55's and over, this is disproportionate in such a small area of the district and has left no affordable accommodation for locals to rent. Does this council agree that their policy to deliver 300 homes over 10 years is woefully inadequate and should be adjusted to reflect local need?

ANSWER:

Thank you Mrs Lawes.

The council has committed to directly deliver up to 1,300 between now and 2035/36 additional affordable council homes, not the 300 you refer to. We are committed directly to deliver those homes as part of our policy to delivery affordable council homes. As part of our affordable housing policies, we are also working to secure affordable homes in developments across the district and deliver more homes through our housing association partners. Helping local people to remain in the district is a priority for the Council and we are doing all that we can to maximise the opportunities for people do this. The Council's flagship new garden town development at Otterpool Park will provide significant employment and housing options for future generations.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

What are you doing to rectify local need, instead of people being forced out of the district?

ANSWER:

I think I've replied adequately, we are doing all we can to provide additional homes for all residents of the district, as fast as we can. Sometimes we cannot do this quick enough, and I accept that, but we will continue to try and develop the housing programme.

Council – 21 July 2021

Councillor questions:

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

The decision of the Government to remove the ‘temporary’ uplift in Universal Credit on 1st October is going to hurt the poorest households in Folkestone and Hythe.

The architect of Universal Credit, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, and five of his successors - Stephen Crabb, Damian Green, David Gauke, Esther McVey and Amber Rudd - have said that a failure to keep the uplift in place would 'damage living standards, health and opportunities for some of the families that need our support most as we emerge from the pandemic. The extra £20 [...] has been essential in allowing people to live with dignity'.

Will the Leader of the Council join with me in writing to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to request that the uplift be incorporated permanently into Universal Credit?"

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Prater.

The matter you raise is one of central policy and for the Chancellor in taking a holistic view of the total spend of government. If Cllr Prater wishes to write to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, then he should feel free to do so.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

With around 8,500 households in the Folkestone and Hythe area on Universal Credit, the move would benefit local people and the local economy £170k per week (£9 million per year). I will write to government, but I don't understand why you won't join me in lobbying the Government?

ANSWER:

That was not a question, it was a political statement.

2. From Councillor Whybrow to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Will the future residents at the Princes Parade development be subject to a management service charge to cover the maintenance of the public open spaces, the surface water drainage system etc?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Whybrow. You are right in that the vision for Princes Parade, as well as providing a brand new leisure centre, will also be providing accessible green open spaces and amenities for the whole of the community to enjoy, including a play area and a wider more useable promenade. The intention is for the operation of all these public open spaces to be funded through Council resources which will be built into the normal operations of the Council's teams. Any financial implications will be managed as part of the Council's normal budget setting process.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

This doesn't address the issue of the surface water drainage system. How will the long term maintenance costs be covered?

ANSWER:

Subject to confirmation, anything that is related to the leisure centre and open spaces will be part of the council budget, and the people in the facility won't be subject to a separate management charge.

3. From Councillor Gane to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

With regard to the KCC consultation on cycle lane, could the Cabinet Member assure the shop owners in Cheriton High Street and Cheriton Road that the matter will be discussed at the next Joint Transportation Board meeting and that the views of the residents and shop keepers will be heard?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Gane.

A request has been made to KCC, asking them to present details of the consultation at the next meeting of the Joint Transportation Board.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

4. From Councillor J Martin to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Following the site investigations at Prince's Parade carried out in April this year, the Idom Merebrook Factual Report dated May 2021, the report says they found:

PAH – this means Carbon: coal, oil, gas etc. TPH – Total Petroleum hydrocarbon: crude oil. Asbestos: white and brown, Medical odours detected with lots of needles found, Strong Hydro carbon odours detected, Ground Gas detected, Heavy Metals Discovered: Arsenic, cadmium, cyanide, mercury, Lots of decomposing organic material, Many obstructions preventing trial

holes being drilled, Trial pit collapses due to unstable ground, Standing Ground water 3.8M below ground level, Ground Water generally 5-8M, Ground Water detected at 24M in one trial hole, Weald Clay, base not proven at 16.6M.

We know that the leisure centre at Prince's Parade is costing approximately £9 million pounds more than the equivalent leisure centre at Martello Lakes, in light of the Trial Pit report, my question therefore is the enormous budget enough given the ground investigations?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Martin.

When the Princes Parade scheme was approved, it was recognised that the site, being a former municipal rubbish tip, would require detailed site investigations to understand the nature and quantity of the contamination on the site.

The recent site investigations have been extensive so that we can fully understand in detail what that contamination is, what impact it is having on the site, and importantly this information will help us to develop an appropriate remediation strategy. The constructors have, as you will be aware, carried out a significant amount of testing and this is currently being fully evaluated.

Once the impact of this is fully known and evaluated, then an assessment will be made of the impact on delivering the scheme which will be considered when looking at the scheme in its entirety.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The contract entered with BAM is a two stage design and build contract, which is notorious for cost increased. Given the results, is the enormous budget enough?

ANSWER:

We will find out when we consider it in its entirety.

5. From Councillor J Martin to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building Control

Like every Councillor my inbox is full of complaints from resident regarding the problems with waste and recycling collections. I know that many people are working very hard to resolve the problems. I am also sure that every Councillor has heard a variety of rumours regarding the cause of the problems. Can Councillor Peall give us his understand of how we ended up in this sorry situation?

ANSWER:

Thank you for the question Cllr Martin.

I would firstly like to apologise again to members and to our residents generally for the problems experienced with the waste collection service. The council is pressing Veolia very hard to resolve these issues and I will outline some of these actions in my response.

The council agreed to the proposed route changes from Veolia with good intentions and following assurances from Veolia that the changes could be delivered successfully. We were advised the new routes would be more efficient and in turn would reduce the overall level of carbon emissions, which would be an important step in meeting our overall carbon emission goals.

We were also led to believe that the project would only result in limited disruption to our residents, with the main period of disruption being the first four weeks or the equivalent of two waste collection cycles. It is worth saying that we did not accept these changes lightly and in fact delayed the original start date in April because we did not think Veolia's plans and preparation were sufficiently robust at that stage, and also they were trying to do us and DDC at the same time. This was despite facing potential additional contract costs from delaying.

Unfortunately, despite the additional assurances we received from Veolia about their ability to deliver the changes successfully, the implementation of the new routes has not been successful and has resulted in an unacceptable level of missed bins which has negatively impacted on our residents. To add to these problems, in recent weeks there has been the added impact on the service of a national shortage in HGV drivers and the upsurge in Covid-19 cases and self-isolation requirements which is impacting on staffing and service delivery. Today, sixteen staff were absent, of which eleven staff have been told to self-isolate and this sadly, has impacted significantly on the food and recycling service.

The reasons for the problems experienced are varied and need careful review and consideration. For this reason, I asked Overview and Scrutiny to set up a Task and Finish Group to look at the route optimisation project and various other changes. I am keen for feedback and input.

In my view the following are the three main causes.

Firstly, Veolia made errors in the assumptions that informed their overall route optimisation plan. This was surprising bearing in mind their knowledge of the district from the previous 10-year contract but it has become clear that the initial division of rounds to properties was over optimistic and the allocation of properties over each working day has not been correctly scaled. The overall impact of this has been regular shortfalls in completion rates each day and work being carried over to the next day to involve weekend working too. This has led to a significant increase in the number of reported missed bins.

Secondly, Veolia have not sufficiently incorporated their previous working knowledge of the district into the new routes and captured this information on their new Echo IT system. This has led to numerous individual problems that often have needed to be painstakingly resolved causing further frustration to our residents. An example of this been the omitting of presentation points for some communal bins and similar problems for assisted collections. I am sure members can point to numerous similar issues in their own wards. Again, if you are seeing these, please let me know and I will get these dealt with.

Lastly, Veolia have also introduced a new on board IT system called Echo. This was meant to support the new routes but in our view has not been rolled out well and has in practice hindered as much it has helped. There were problems in the data transfer that became more evident as the weeks passed. Crews appear to have been told to diligently keep to what the system shows rather than being able to exercise their own common sense.

The following actions have taken place to resolve this situation:

Veolia are working on revising the route plan, which is fundamental to resolving the current problems and we are pressing them for a timetable and a clear plan for the long-term resolution of these issues.

Veolia have also set up their own call centre, at their expense, to take missed bin calls, which has eased the pressure on our own Customer Contact Service. I want to thank those teams, as I'm aware of the issues they have experienced.

We will also be seeking financial redress via the performance clauses within the contract as well as any other financial reparations available (i.e. recovery of any additional costs). We are happy to invest to help, and are being proactive in looking for solutions.

As you know we have been meeting on a weekly basis since mid-June with Veolia Senior Management including their Managing Director for the Municipal Division to robustly escalate and resolve the unacceptable problems being experienced. This has resulted in an improvement plan being actioned that included the provision of more vehicle rounds and staff to improve performance. This plan has not resulted in the step change in service improvement required and today we have escalated this further through Veolia's senior national executive leadership.

An upsurge in COVID-19 cases and the continued shortage of HGV drivers has resulted in a further impact on service delivery and compounded the level of missed collections. Veolia has therefore requested that the Council agree that they implement a Business Continuity Plan to focus resources on recovery of priority collection services.

As a consequence of the continued poor performance and pressures, and in response to Veolia's request to enact their Business Continuity Plans, begrudgingly, I have taken the difficult decision today to suspend the Garden Waste service with immediate effect.

Residents that pay for the Garden Waste Collection will be offered a rebate for the loss of this service by the end of the financial year. We will be communicating this tomorrow to those residents that subscribe for the service and again, I offer my sincere apologies that the matter has come to this.

I do appreciate the difficulties this will raise for some residents, but on balance the council needs to prioritise clinical, food, refuse, and recycling rounds in the circumstances we are facing. We have had assurances from Veolia that this action will result in a positive impact on the remaining collections and we will of course seek to recoup losses to the council from Veolia.

Since this answer was put together, we have received a statement from Veolia:

“Due to the National driver shortage and the number of self-isolations at the Folkestone depot (currently numbering 11) we have severe staff shortages. Veolia apologises that due to these issues this is impacting further on service issues on both the refuse and recycling and street cleansing elements of the contract and it is likely over the coming weeks these issues will continue due to Covid self-isolations, From 16th August when isolation rules are relaxed we do expect to see an improvement in staff availability, but if residents could please be patient whilst Veolia works through this challenging time, which is impacting waste collections across the country, and we are unfortunately no different here in East Kent” .

I categorically disagree with that last sentence. The issues we are seeing here are down to Management, lack of understanding, and a breakdown between officers on the street, and the management.

I will continue to keep members of the council updated as we continue to seek urgent service improvements.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Thank you for your comprehensive heartfelt answer. Could you utilise fellow Councillors within this process? We are all willing to help, and can pass the message out to the public. You are not alone in this situation, and we will all support your efforts.

ANSWER:

Thank you for that. I will be as honest and open as I can be. It is the reason why I asked for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be involved, and set up the task and finish group. If you have any ideas, we will take it from you. We will share information as much information as we can.

6. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

Please could we have an update on the progress of the draft Place plan including the number of responses to the second public survey?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Davison.

Following the second webinar in June, 18 completed surveys were received. The draft Place Plan has been received by officers and is currently under review, officers are in the process of liaising with strategic partners to ensure that recommendations do not present fundamental concerns, in advance of any future proposed activity. This review is necessary before the draft Place Plan comes to Cabinet on Wednesday 15th September. In addition, the draft Place Plan will be made available on the dedicated webpage from Monday 9th August. As throughout this process, the public can still get in touch with the council's officers and consultants regarding the Place Plan via place.plan@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I would be grateful if you could clarify who the strategic partners are that you refer to, and also a commitment that it includes representatives from the community, elected members of this chamber, Folkestone Town Council and relevant KCC Members

ANSWER:

I will get you a list of all partners involved, and email it to you.

Following the meeting, the following response was provided:

Below is an overview of the groups who we are seeking to engage further with prior to September Cabinet:

*Kent County Council
Folkestone Town Council
Stagecoach
Network Rail
South Eastern
Radnor Estate
Folkestone and Hythe Business Advisory Board
Shepway Sports Trust
Creative Folkestone
Environment Agency
Homes England
Historic England
Natural England
East Kent College*

We are currently in the process of securing dates for meetings with Folkestone Town Centre Working Group and Folkestone Town Council as part of this review process.

In parallel to the uploading of the draft Place Plan onto our dedicated webpage on Monday 9th August (for public feedback), we will email the 600+ contacts engaged during the development of the Place Plan, advising them the draft Place Plan is available for comment. A Folkestone Place Plan Engagement Report is also on the web page and I trust this is also helpful background.

It's important to note that moving forward there will also be consultation on a bespoke project by project basis.

7. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed buildings and conservation areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to designate areas for conservation which are of special architectural or historical interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. FHDC has designated Priory Gardens as part of a conservation area because of the “character of its topography; in other words, the coastline; the sea; the beach; the steep cliff face; the panoramic views down towards the beach and out to sea.” Why then has F-HDC allowed the unchecked growth and proliferation of sycamore trees on its land between Priory Gardens and the Road of Remembrance to obscure those views?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Davison.

The purpose of a Conservation Area is to provide additional controls and protections when considering development within the identified conservation area, as well as areas which should/could be improved as part of any development proposals. In this respect the Council would have to give special regard to any development that would change the topography of the land. At present there are no development proposals which would impact on the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

The growing of vegetation is not development as it does not permanently interrupt views or permanently change the character of the area. The removal of trees and vegetation from this area is a highly technical task requiring the Road of Remembrance to be closed for a prolonged period and all of the trees lowered down the bank so that they can be removed. Officers have looked at this several times and quotes have been obtained for this work which have been in excess of £40k which is not currently in the budget framework.

The decision to remove or cut trees would require Conservation Area consent and would be subject to visual amenity considerations.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

In your email reply to a resident on this subject, the Leader advised that the council's position has not changed – ie that it would not take action to remove these sycamores on the bank to restore the views. Can you please explain when and how this position was adopted by the council?

ANSWER:

As far as I am aware there has not been a specific change. It is fair to say, we are aware of the situation with the sycamores, and in an ideal world there is scope towards improvements being undertaken, bearing in mind it is a conservation area. You are preaching to the converted, and budgets allowing, we will consider when looking at the budget proposals.

8. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Goddard, Chairman of the Planning and Licensing Committee

Recently I had to raise an issue where planning permission for development had been given too close to trees on Shorncliffe road, meaning trees had to be removed or cut back, when this could have been avoided at the planning stage. Why was permission given for a development footprint for the Leas pavilion the scale of which means that pavements on all four sides around the site are now lost to local residents until 2023?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Councillor Davison.

The Leas Pavilion is a constrained site within the built up area of Folkestone. The entire site is required for construction purposes up to the site boundaries, and in such circumstances, it is common practice for footpaths around the site to be temporarily re-directed, to allow for safe passage for pedestrians. This was anticipated at the planning stage in the knowledge that the disruption of construction activity is temporary. This is controlled by Highways legislation. Kent County Council is the Highway Authority and has responsibility for adopted roads and footpaths.

The developer has been liaising with Kent County Council and has secured the appropriate hoarding licence. The developer has set up temporary arrangements on Longford Terrace and installed signage around the site in consultation with Kent County Council. We are aware that the developers are also applying to Kent County Council for a permanent solution to permanently widen the eastern footpath which runs alongside Priors Lees and is currently terminates at an existing ground floor balcony. This will provide a permanent pedestrian improvement to the street network and an alternative crossing on to The Leas. During the course of the development alternative pedestrian connections are available.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can the district put in place a lead person to work with residents and ward representatives to resolve this situation?

ANSWER:

I can ask the Planning Team, but such things are monitored by the council's enforcement team.

Following the meeting, the following additional response was provided:

The current issues are not related to any planning activity. Going forward breaches of planning control will be monitored by the Enforcement Team.

In the first instance residents should contact the developers community liaison. When we have details of this we will provide contact details.

9. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building Control

We are all aware of the chaotic service provided over the last two months by Veolia in collecting residents waste / rubbish. I am still receiving complaints regarding missed pick-ups etc. As this service is paid for by residents through their council tax can you please advise whether a rebate, discount or refund will be given for this lack of service that many have paid for, but not received?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Meade.

The service provided by Veolia on the waste collections has been totally unacceptable and, as discussed in my previous answer, the council is pushing Veolia extremely hard to resolve these problems. I can appreciate the point made about the lack of service and rebates but I think the best approach is for the council look at options to seek financial reparations from Veolia in the first instance for the poor service received and any additional costs to the council. The legal process will however be lengthy, and it was not a 10 minute solution.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can you provide assurance that the money will be ring-fenced to pay back to affected residents, maybe through Council Tax next time?

ANSWER:

I cannot give absolute assurances because we don't know what the legal outcome would be. The contract is worth just under £5 million a year, with just over 52,000 households paying for this service. This works out around (for

waste collection only service) £1.37 per week per household, which putting into context is immense. I have to be cautious about the level of rebate we could offer. It's more likely to be an overall rebate across Council Tax.

10. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance

With school holidays now upon us and self-distancing restrictions being lifted, can you please confirm that all the play park equipment that was removed to ensure distancing, has now been reinstated and that the children's play areas have had the necessary maintenance such as grass areas cut and fencing and equipment checked, to ensure it is safe and ready for the extra usage over the summer months?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Councillor Meade.

The operations team have been working throughout the pandemic to ensure the safety of all of our residents and visitors who use our play areas. The property team undertake regular inspections in excess of those required by law and complies with all best practice requirements. Based on HMG legislation certain items were removed from play areas to assist with social distancing. Now that these requirements have been lifted the team are working through putting all of these items back in place over the next week in preparation for the school holidays. The Grounds Maintenance team will continue to ensure the parks grass, trees and hedges remain kept to a high standard.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

11. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

With the onset of summer and the additional footfall that we will see in Folkestone, with people visiting our beaches what provision are we going to put in place in order to keep residents and visitors safe while they enjoy our town and coast line?

ANSWER:

Thanks for your question Councillor Keen.

Teams across both the Place and Housing and Operations directorates work together to support residents and visitors to enjoy our district and particularly during peak summer periods. This includes regular patrols at key locations to ensure there is a visible and proactive presence on the ground. In addition to our core operational teams, this year we will have our 2 Community Support

Officers and 3 additional Area Officers, bringing the team to 7, working across the district at key locations and particularly at weekends. Also, as part the Community Safety Partnership our teams work very closely with partners such as local policing to address anti-social behaviour and support crime prevention.

Our teams also aim to ensure that litter is reported cleared as much as possible but the Council is also promoting the need for visitors to be responsible and place litter in bins provided or indeed take it home to dispose of.

Please be assured our teams are working hard to ensure that everyone can enjoy our fantastic and beautiful district.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Down at Marine Parade, businesses are not taking responsibility. What steps can we take to ensure that they do?

ANSWER:

We would encourage and try to promote the looking after of our district to all people, not just businesses, and I'm sure we will be taking your comments on board.

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

Our lifeguards who service the area rely solely on charitable donation which were greatly reduced last year. As a District council we have a duty of care to make sure that resident and visitors to the district are safe from harm. Can I ask that as a council, we find some funding to help the lifeguards with the service they provide, and that we supply them with a base to work from which I understand has been in the making for over two years, and not the shipping container that they use at present?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Councillor Keen.

The lifeguard provision provided by Folkestone Rescue is not a Folkestone & Hythe District Council service. As a District Council we do have a duty of care to our residents and visitors, our beaches have been assessed and information boards, as well as life buoys, are provided throughout the district. In addition to this we support groups who provide charitable resources. These include the coastguard, and Folkestone Rescue who we provide a lease with a peppercorn rent to house their container on the Stade Area. FHDC has been working hard to secure the lease for the Southern Water Pumping Station on Coronation Parade, and once this completes Folkestone Rescue will be provided with lookout facilities within this building through a suitable peppercorn rent arrangement.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can we put a time frame around this?

ANSWER:

I cannot give an exact timeframe, as I'm not clear where we are in negotiations, but I will provide a written response.

Following the meeting, the following further response was provided:

Officers have been working hard to secure the lease of the public toilet facilities, the lookout and the kiosk from the owners Southern Water for some time. Negotiations remain ongoing and Officers are hopeful they will be concluded shortly. At the moment a timeframe cannot be provided as this is largely out of our hands. The Council understand the value and importance of the facilities and will continue to work to secure the lease at the earliest opportunity.

13. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building Control

Why is there no foot Street Sweepers cleaning the Harbour area? I understand there are now only three across the district and the area that has possibly the highest number of visitors in the summer relies solely on the Veolia trucks that come along and empty the bins. The first one arriving at just after 9am. After an event like PRIDE we could have made special arrangements. I was embarrassed as their local councillor to see residents having to go out on to Lower Sandgate Road to pick up rubbish. This was at 7.30am and the first Veolia truck arrived just after 9am.

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question. I will ask the Events Team to look into what special arrangements were made with the organisers of the Pride Event for clearing of any additional waste. This is commonly discussed with large-scale events. I have also asked the Waste Team to check and if necessary default Veolia for their late start on Sunday morning.

I would make a general point that in terms of street cleansing this summer the council has supplemented the existing bin provision with additional bulk bins along the coast including West Parade and Sunny Sands. Veolia have implemented changes to make more staff available over the weekends and later. The council has also invested £1m in purchasing new street cleansing vehicles and equipment including new mechanical sweepers and electric carts for bin emptying.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

14. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance

There appears around the district to be a lack of ground maintenance. Hedges and verges are overgrown and weeds are flourishing along our curbs. Grass in and around social housing estates and open spaces are left uncut. In view of this can I ask why our ground maintenance budget has been cut?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Keen for your question.

Following an unusually prolonged cold spring, the recent warm, wet weather has caused the grass to grow at an exceptionally fast rate, which gives the impression it has not been cut for some time, when this is in fact not the case. This is not a result of budgetary or staffing cuts, but environmental circumstances beyond our control. Our teams are all out mowing as normal and have been working in to the evenings and over the weekends to keep up with the demands of the long grass.

It is important to note however, that our mowing regime is dictated by two separate factors: those sites that are owned and managed by Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC) (such as our parks and public open spaces), which are maintained at a much higher frequency and those that we maintain under contract to external clients (such as the highway verges for Kent County Council). KCC pay FHDC to mow the highway verges on six occasions per year between March and October which equates to one cut every six weeks on average. KCC do not pay us to collect the grass clippings and expect them to be left on site to mulch down in to the verges. It should also be noted that FHDC fund further cuts to these areas to help improve the appearance of the district. We are optimistic that this is situation will only last for a few short weeks during early summer before the rate of growth slows down and our teams can get round their routes more quickly. With regards to hedge cutting, this is programmed to take place in August following the end of the bird nesting season.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

The time limit expired following this question, and the following question was answered during the consideration of the agenda item 12 (Minute No 22).

15. From Councillor Keutenius to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Could the council please outline the procurement process regarding the contract to carry out works to the Connect 38 building, including number of tenders received and an explanation of the scoring processes?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr Keutenius.

In May 2021, Cabinet took an urgent decision to modify the Council's capital programme and add £400,000 monies to it to enable Category A (CatA) specification works to the vacant space at the office building Connect 38.

Following a welcomed resurgence of interest in office space at the start of 2021, heads of terms were agreed with a potential new tenant for second floor space at the building who required occupation by 30 July 2021. Therefore the CatA works to the second floor needed to be undertaken immediately to enable this deadline to be met.

The Council had originally appointed a consultant to tender the CatA works, however due to the urgent nature of the proposed deal with the tenant, a waiver of the Contract Standing Orders was sought. This is because there was a significant risk that going through the standard procurement route would mean that the Council would lose the potential tenant as the works would not be completed in the required timeline to secure the letting. The new tenant rent is worth c.£170,000 p.a. to the Council's income. The waiver was therefore supported and approved by cabinet to take advantage of current positive market conditions before they wane and secure a new tenant as soon as possible.

The following questions were not answered at the meeting, as the time limit had expired. Written responses were provided to those who had submitted the questions

16. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

Could the Cabinet Member for housing provide the latest figures for homelessness approaches to the council since the eviction ban came to an end on the 1st June of this year?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr McConville.

During June of this year, the Council received 138 approaches from potentially homeless households in the district. This number is slightly up from the number in May, which was 133 households and in April 102. Overall, the number of approaches received in the first quarter of 2021/22 at 373, is down from the number of approaches received in the last quarter of 2020/21, in which there were 417 approaches. At this time, there is no evidence to indicate a significant impact due to the ending of the eviction ban.

However, the Council's Housing Options Team are continuing to work to prevent homelessness wherever possible and to maximise the number of suitable long-term homes both in the affordable and private sectors, for households that unfortunately become homeless. The team also continue to monitor cases very closely as we are aware that some evictions have been put on hold during the pandemic period, although we do not have specific data on the number of cases.

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

Could the Cabinet Member provide the total numbers for the past year of those residents who have applied for council tax relief or support?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Cllr McConville.

I can confirm that from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 Folkestone & Hythe District Council processed 2,953 new claims for Council Tax Reduction. It should be noted that many would have been awarded the support based on the Council receiving a notification that they are in receipt of Universal Credit. Some of the applicants may have also been awarded support on more than one occasion depending on their changing circumstances.

During this time period the Council also received 481 applications for Financial Support Payments. I should add that for financial support payments, a form is not always completed, as we do get direct referrals from our external partners so the welfare team work on them directly.