

Leader's Q&A session

Held at: Remote meeting.

Date: Wednesday, 17 June 2020 4pm

1. Questions from the public

1. From Mr M Herd (answered by Councillor Monk)

As someone that lived in London for 20 years then moving to Folkestone for 6, many friends and visitors are amazed by Folkestone and didn't previously know anything about the town. With Kings Cross being such a huge working hub with Facebook and Google, shouldn't the council start promoting the town and its regeneration to start putting the town on the map? Attracting people to live in Folkestone out of choice is a great way to build a strong community that contributes locally.

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Herd for your question.

You are absolutely right that our proximity and connectivity to London, and especially the digital and creative sector at Kings Cross is a real opportunity for the district. As we ease out of lockdown we also anticipate people will be attracted by our coastline, fresh air, open spaces and quality of life.

We have invested in the creation of a place marketing campaign to promote the district as a destination to live, work, visit and invest in. This launched in autumn of last year and encourages people to 'experience the extraordinary', highlighting the unique and distinctive experience that people will find here – arts and culture, food and drink, independent shops, our world-class visitor attractions.

You can find out more about our place campaign at folkestoneandhythe.co.uk or by following @FHExtraordinary on Twitter or LinkedIn. COVID-19 has put some of the planned activities on hold but the campaign will be picking up pace once more as our district opens for business.

Our economic development team actively promote inward investment from companies outside the district through direct contact and via our business website Folkestone.works. As part of the market research conducted last autumn, London businesses were engaged to understand their current perception of Folkestone as a place to relocate their business, which has provided much needed insight. Looking ahead, the commercial space incorporated into the plan for Otterpool Park is a further opportunity to attract creative and digital companies.

2. From Mr T Cooper (answered by Councillor Monk)

We have a couple of district council playgrounds in St Mary's Bay which have over the years been neglected, not maintained and closed as a consequence of your council ignoring complaints and consistently under funding the maintenance and replacement of children's play equipment in the Bay. In light of this, and excluding the current pandemic, can you please tell me when your council will provide the children and families of the village with play equipment in a safe place to play

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Cooper for your question.

This council has given a renewed focus in play provision and in recent years the Council has progressively increased the revenue budget from £5,000 to £15,000 per annum. This does not include the costs of the officers who undertake the work, their training, vehicles, fuel and tools, etc. In general most repairs can be undertaken quickly and cost effectively using our internal maintenance team, however where an item is irreparable or past its useful life, it must be removed. Our budget does not allow us to carry out significant alterations to play areas and for this reason we work closely with charitable organisations and with developer contributions to deliver successful investment such as those which are enjoyed at Radnor Park.

We recognise that the 2 FHDC sites within St Mary's Bay are in a poor state of repair. Following approval of the proposed Play Area Strategy we will be engaging in discussions with the Parish Council regarding the on-going maintenance and repair of these play areas which includes a dowry payment from the council.

3. From Mr D Jamieson (answered by Councillor Monk)

I would like an answer and justification of why Folkestone and Hythe have the highest council tax rates in the county for the 17th year in succession.

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Jamieson for your question.

Local referendums were introduced in 2012/13 whereby local authorities can only increase council tax by a maximum percentage in line with referendum principles set by the government for each year. If council tax is set in excess of these levels then the local authority is required to hold a referendum of all registered local electors. Prior to 2012/13 there was no limit on the increase that could be applied as long as it wasn't deemed excessive by Government who could then impose a cap on increases.

Since 2012/13 FHDC annual increases have been in line with referendum principles our council tax charge remains the highest primarily due to the compounding of prior year increases rather than recent decisions taken. Indeed the district had the lowest overall increases in Kent in 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2019/20 for council tax.

Folkestone & Hythe have the highest level of council tax primarily due to historical decisions. The council tax determination for 2004/05 took the level to the highest in Kent.

During the last 10 years the Council Tax increases for the district council have been in line with or below the Kent average.

Council Tax is a key source of income for a District Council and it supports the vast array of services delivered within our extraordinary district including our exceptional coastline, parks & open spaces, the regeneration initiatives within our high streets, our community response in light of the recent pandemic, our public facilities, waste and recycling, and support for the most vulnerable in our communities, amongst many others.

4. From Mr Guyot (answered by Councillor Monk)

The last few years have seen a surge of public and private investment to attract more visitors to the town. While it has proved successful somehow all those efforts seems diminished by the state of the town from littering to anti-social behaviour and graffiti's. The town centre (Bayle, Church, Harbour) , the Leas and lately the Lower Leas Park are the most affected area.

From heavy fine, to litter warden, it should be one of the top priority of the council as this is a serious problem which could damage Folkestone reputation as a visitor destination and a town to move in.

I would like to know what is the council planning to do this summer & in the near future.

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Guyot for your question.

I agree with your comment that there has been significant investment within the district in recent years and we have welcomed more visitors as

a result, with many of our assets and attractions being hailed as being some of the most popular in Kent. Sadly, some of those visitors do not show respect for the district during their visits. The Council has engaged in a number of initiatives to respond to the growing visitor numbers. I will summarise some of these as follows:

Patrolling - The Environmental Protection Team is deployed to tackle the litter and Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) within the District. Special operations take place during early mornings, evenings and during the weekends to catch those who litter or act in an anti-social manner. Within Folkestone particular attention has been given to the Leas, Harbour and Coastal Park. Last year the Enforcement Team issued a total of 42 x £100 Fixed Penalty Notices to offenders, and since January 2020 have issued a further 15 FPNs despite the lockdown.

ASB - The Council introduced an improved Public Spaces Protection Order in June 2019. This allows Council staff and the police to take direct action against anti-social alcohol consumption, aggressive begging, anti-social street entertainment, spitting and defecating in public spaces. The Council has a good effective relationship with the local police which has resulted in more joint working and visible high presence on-the-street operations (e.g. Op Ariel).

Graffiti - The Council's Area Officers do a great job in removing graffiti and tags across the district often the same day as reported. They also help organise regular community litter picks throughout the district which, although this year have been disrupted, are re-starting in earnest.

Extra Bins - We work with our street cleansing contractor Veolia to identify hot spots that would benefit from additional bulk bins (e.g. Sunny Sands) and these are deployed in locations throughout of the district. This builds on the investment the council has already made to increase litter and dog fouling bins throughout the district, including the introduction of high capacity Big Belly Bins in the coastal park. Additional cleansing staff and cleansing vehicles are brought in for the summer and deployed to increase the frequency of emptying.

5. **From Ms K Rowledge (answered by Councillor Monk)**

Please could you give us an update on the asbestos contamination at The Warren (how did it get there, how likely is it to happen again, how dangerous is it to health, and what is being done - now and in future), and are there still plans for the nuclear waste disposal at Romney Marsh?

ANSWER:

Thank you Ms Rowledge for your question.

The asbestos contamination at the Warren appears to have come from an old landfill site that has been exposed due to coastal erosion, though there appear to be no formal records. The council has taken measures to close the beach and cleaned up any obvious contaminants in the area. Work has been ongoing to analyse the contaminants by specialists collecting samples and we are awaiting the results. This will enable us to understand any potential risks that may have been caused. Emergency works have taken place to build a rock revetment around the site that will provide protection through the summer period. Once the results are in from the samples a plan will be developed to ensure the ongoing safety of the site, both in the short and long term. The beach will be monitored regularly by council officers and it will be opened when we are confident there is no risk to the public.

6. From L Ruddock (answered by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee)

I have lived in Cheriton since October 1978. When we came here the ground floor of the building that houses the library in Cheriton was a thriving Health centre.

Over the years this large space has become redundant and is no longer being used. Since 1978 Cheriton has grown significantly with many more homes and families.

This building is very central on a regular bus route and would provide easy access to people. It would make an ideal base for a local health clinic, a facility that would be very welcome and which, in many people's opinion, is sorely needed.

Please can you consider this?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The space you refer to is being looked at and further details will be available in due course. The proposed use will look at including community health support in some shape or form.

We very much support the idea of maximising the use of community space and will be speaking with CCG colleagues to look at this particularly in the light of Covid 19 and the way our community hubs have developed. The GP primary care networks (PCNs) are keen to work with us and this is a developing area of activity. We will be working with the PCNs as this is the kind of opportunity PCN's are looking to develop with partners within existing services.

7. From Ms N Chwalibogowski (answered by Councillor Monk)

Thank you Ms Chwalibogowski for your question.

With worries about climate change and loss of biodiversity, how are you going to counter balance building on Princes Parade in order to help keep green spaces available and provide habitats for nature?

ANSWER:

Development throughout the district is guided by policies in the council's development plan. The council has been preparing the Places and Policies Local Plan which contains a number of policies designed to secure green spaces and enhance habitats.

Policy C3 requires new developments to provide open space according to the standards it sets out. The policy also protects existing open spaces. Other policies in the plan require that new developments use on-site renewable and low-carbon energy technologies, use sustainable design and construction techniques and enhance bio-diversity (for example through the use of pollinator habitats). The Local Plan has been through a number of stages of consultation and a public examination, led by an independent planning Inspector. The council is expecting the Inspector's Report very soon and, if favourable, we can go on to adopt the Local Plan and apply these policies to new developments.

With regard to Princes Parade, the ecological impact of the proposed development was considered in full within the Environmental Statement accompanying the planning application, and a schedule of mitigation proposed.

A preliminary ecological assessment, ecological method statement, habitat creation plan, lighting plan and lighting design plan for bio-diversity will all be submitted to and agreed by the local planning authority prior to the commencement of development. The proposed leisure centre is located in a sustainable urban location, reducing the need to travel and avoiding development in open countryside. The development will also secure the remediation and clean-up of a contaminated site and the new homes and new leisure centre will perform to a much higher environmental standards than current Hythe Swimming Pool and the vast majority of existing housing stock, thereby reducing carbon emissions.

8. From Mr B Bane (answered by Councillor Godfrey)

I would like to know why on earth there are Police parking bays in New Romney and Lydd, I cannot see any reason for it apart from some misinformed information that must have been passed up the line.

In Lydd there are no public parking car parks, so to take a parking space in the Middle of the High Street is madness.

If there is an emergency the police can park where they need to, if the reason is so the PCSO can park there this too is wrong on 2 fronts 1.We

never see PCSO's walking about Lydd and the Police station is only 500m from the High street so they could walk from there.

I have only ever seen Police vehicles on 2 occasions 1 being a PCSO and the other CNC(power station Police) and on both occasions it was them shopping for their lunch.

Now onto New Romney I would think exactly the same happens there, if the Police want to have their own personal parking space put it in one of the 2 car parks they have in New Romney rather than the middle of the High Street, I am sure the Police staff can walk 50m to get there lunch.

ANSWER:

Thank you Mr Bane for your question.

The parking bays referred to were implemented after a statutory consultation with residents and stakeholders in August 2019. The consultation received no objections.

The parking bays allow Police Officers to carry out foot patrols in the town while having the vehicle nearby to respond to calls out of the area. It is not just the local officers that use the parking bays. Patrols will often attend from Folkestone and they will need the vehicle to be parked close by.

Officers have discussed the use of the bays with the Chief Inspector who has assured us that the bays are necessary and are well used. Having said this, he has said that if the local community no longer want the bays in the high streets then he would be open to discuss this although he believes removal of the bays would be at the detriment of local policing. If this is the case then a formal request should be considered by the respective Town Councils prior to approaching the District Council.

9. From Ms C Cooper (answered by Councillor Monk)

As a council taxpayer I and other residents of St Mary's Bay face your Council spending millions of pounds on castles, shops in Folkestone and office blocks in Ashford, while our children and grandchildren have nowhere, within reasonable walking distance to play, current crisis aside, due to your council underfunding maintenance and replacement of play equipment for far too long.

What is the reason why you can't move the proposed playground development from the Sands Motel site on the A259 to the neglected playground behind the village hall in Oak Drive and when can we expect this to be done?

ANSWER:

Thank you Ms Cooper for your question.

The Sands Motel is considered by local Councillors as a strategic area for development and as such a play area is required for the site under the S106 agreement. Discussions will take place with the Parish Council following the approval of the Play Area Strategy to discuss the ongoing maintenance strategy for play areas in St Mary's Bay.

2. **Questions from Councillors**

1. **From Councillor J Martin (answered by Councillor Monk)**

We need more bins on West Parade Promenade in Hythe, the recent fine weather means bulging bins which the seagulls pillage and scatter rubbish across the promenade and onto the beach. The real risk is the amount of rubbish entering the sea at high tide - what is being done to address this issue?

ANSWER:

The Council has made a strong commitment to 'appearance matters' and has over 800 litter bins within the district. In preparation for the summer extra bulk bins have been added at several locations along the coast including Hythe.

I understand that the Waste Team have already contacted you with regard to the West Parade and have put in place additional arrangements for the emptying of the litter bins at that location, which have already made a difference. Beach cleaners are employed to reduce the risk of rubbish entering the sea and any remaining non-seagull proof bins at this location will be swapped out.

This will be kept under review to see if it resolves the issues raised. If not, subject to budgets, we will look to install more litter bins if needed.

I would add that this problem seems to have increased in lockdown.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The waste team from Veolia have been excellent, and there hasn't been a question unanswered. They are aware and engaged. Obviously the risk of rubbish getting into the sea is the real problem. The promenade at West Parade is narrow, and the sea is close, and so the rubbish blows into the sea. What priority do you and the council place on preventing this disaster, which occurs on a daily basis?

ANSWER:

If the litter bins provided are used, then the problem goes away. Those that are open topped can empty out, and we are gradually replacing these with bins with flaps on to stop things blowing away. This is an ongoing situation.

2. From Councillor J Martin (answered by Councillor Godfrey)

How can the severe congestion for walkers, runners, cyclists, push chairs, wheelchairs along the promenade in Hythe (same applies in Sandgate) be better managed?

ANSWER:

Exceptional weather such as experienced recently has always caused the promenade through Hythe and indeed Sandgate to be busier than normal and we have had very few previous complaints; however with social distancing requirements, a huge increase in visitors to the district and locals looking for activities to undertake we have seen a marked increase in use of the promenade. The council recognises and understands that visitor levels are indeed higher than normal, but believes these will subside as other facilities and leisure activities elsewhere re-open. Having said this, FHDC officers are working with KCC to refresh the cycle lanes and put other measures in place (such as signs asking cyclists to dismount during busy periods) where they would be effective. This will be kept under review moving forward. We would like to hope that those using the promenade respect those signs, and help resolve one of the problems you describe.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

If you look on the various Facebook groups, there is a plethora of good advice. Will some of these more imaginative ideas be embraced?

ANSWER:

I would suggest you put these ideas in writing to us, and we will consider the suggestions.

3. From Councillor Treloar (answered by Councillor Monk)

Will the council consider providing a space in the Debenhams building for community oriented/local economy activities to help build resilience and encourage a regenerative, sustainable culture and economy in our district? This might include, for example, a permanent space for local food growers and producers to sell their products, a flexible space for mending and fixing workshops and services, a bicycle workshop and a skills exchange hub.

ANSWER:

Following the successful acquisition of 48-66 Sandgate Rd the Economic Development team has been working on potential meanwhile use schemes for the building until a more long term solution is found. Our ambition has always been to ensure any meanwhile use scheme provides the opportunity

to support local economy activities including those described. The team are looking at flexible use of parts of the building including a pop-up presence and we will consider your suggestion. There have been a number of other interesting concepts which have also come forward and we are actively working to bring these ideas to fruition.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Does the council therefore not consider those sorts of social enterprises, and local economic activities as long term goals?

ANSWER:

We certainly look at them as long term goals, but not in that building. Part of the reason we bought the building was due as an investment opportunity, to generate income.

4. From Councillor Treloar (answered by Councillor Godfrey)

Can the council please provide an update on how we will respond to the Government's new transport guidelines in regards to taking unprecedented action to provide better walking and cycling solutions across the district?

ANSWER

As you are aware Kent County Council (KCC), as the local highway authority, will control the budget handed down from Government as part of the £250 million funding package to help lock in the advantages of active travel and encourage more people to walk and cycle. The County Council submitted a list of local schemes to the Department for Transport (DfT) on Friday 5th June to identify how they intend to allocate/spend an initial tranche of £1.6 million across the county.

Folkestone & Hythe District Council, through James Hammond, Strategy & Policy Senior Specialist, provided feedback on project proposals to be put forward for the district through cross-referencing our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan prepared in 2019, and by citing the well-progressed, but incomplete, Cinque Ports route. Cycle Shepway (a local, and very active, interest group) also put a number of recommendations as to how the local funding allocation could be spent to KCC, and this message was reinforced by the district council. For information, James Hammond provided an overview of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group on the 28th February 2020.

KCC have advised that the submission sent to the DfT on 5th June it is not a definitive list of specific schemes, rather it is a broad set of provisional financial allocations against the following 6 categories:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 1. Carriageway repurposing for cycling and pedestrian capacity | £550,000 |
|--|----------|

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2. Safer journeys to school programme	£200,000
3. Town wide 20mph zones	£200,000
4. Modal Filters and Liveable neighbourhoods	£200,000
5. Recreational cycle and walking schemes including Public Rights Of Way	£240,000
6. Contingency/emergency allocation	£210,000

There are examples within each category of the types of schemes KCC hope to implement. KCC officer colleagues looked at previously collected ideas, suggestions and proposals made by Members, District Councils and the like over the past couple of years that could fit into these groups. This collection, when costed, exceeds well over £10m. Once the DfT confirm they are happy with the proportions and they allocate the funding KCC will need to identify which proposals can be implemented within 8 weeks to gain access to the further £6.4m, giving a combined pot of £8 million across the two tranches of funding to be awarded. These later tranches will present the opportunity for a more “usual” amount of local political input.

F&HDC officers look forward to receiving further information from KCC in respect of those schemes to be funded in due course. Once received, information will be circulated to Members.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can you keep us up to date with any progress with KCC, and can the council to commit to communicating the commitment to sustainable transport?

ANSWER?

I think we can commit to this, as advised in my response.

5. From Councillor Whybrow (answered by Councillor Monk)

How long will the delegated plus emergency planning procedures be in place?

ANSWER:

Members of the Planning & Licensing Committee were contacted about the delegated plus procedure in April by the Chief Planning Officer who explained why these measures were considered necessary in light of the COVIC-19 pandemic, the Council’s current workload and the number of items waiting to be heard at the Planning & Licensing Committee. The Government are also encouraging the use of increased delegation to ensure that the planning system, applicants and the economy can function efficiently during the current situation and to support recovery.

The Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning & Licensing Committee, will keep the use of this process under review to ensure that more normal working practices resume as soon as practicable. The delegated plus procedure still allows for all Members of the Planning & Licensing Committee to air their views directly on these applications to ensure that representative voices are still taken into account in the decision making process. The Chief Planning Officer encourages Members to share their views on each application.

The website provides information regarding current changes to the Planning departments ways of working during the pandemic - <https://folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/planning-covid19>.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

I understand your reasons, but by going through this process when we can hold P&L on-line, are we preventing the public the opportunity to speak?

ANSWER:

I understand that those that are chosen for the plus scheme are the least controversial. However, we are working on options for public participation.

6. From Councillor Meade (answered by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee)

I note from a recent email that the council has temporarily housed 33 homeless during the COVID restrictions. This is an increase of 300% on the numbers that we have been given by the leader every time the question has been asked regarding our homeless over the last three years. As we may now be seeing the end of restrictions in sight, can the council please inform the residents what its plans are for the homeless once the funding has expired?

ANSWER:

At the beginning of lockdown we received a list of 9 verified rough sleepers from the Charity Porchlight, however we went on to house a further 24 households identified at risk of becoming homeless later, so as to ensure any risk of infection rates rising were minimised.

We now have 14 clients remaining accommodated under Covid – 19, having housed 13 households to date long term, 4 were asked to leave the accommodation by accommodation providers because of unmanageable conduct, despite a high level support being in place, while 2 vacated having made their own arrangements.

At this time we continue to work with all those remaining in temporary accommodation under the Covid 19 arrangements, to help them achieve long term rehousing outcomes where possible. We also continue to work closely with our voluntary sector partners to ensure that the necessary

ongoing support services are in place to ensure that people are able to maintain their tenancies going forward.

With respect to clients who are not considered to have a statutory priority need for rehousing and or, are not willing to work with us, to best secure a long term housing solution, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government have directed that such households should be advised to stay with family or friends. We anticipate this will be a very low number of clients, who will none the less retain the offer of financial assistance which could be by way of Rent in Advance and Deposit funds being provided for a suitable property, as well as the offer of floating support should they later secure accommodation with or without our ongoing assistance.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Are we putting a plan in place for what we could consider a high percentage increase in homelessness in next few months?

ANSWER:

Every week at CSU meetings, street homelessness is discussed. All partnership agencies are involved, and a very close watch is kept on the situation. There is a plan in place, but it depends on those people, whether they are willing to engage with us and whether the accommodation we have is available. I can provide a more definitive answer at a later stage.

(Following the meeting the following answer was provided:

At this time we have 8 clients remaining in temporary accommodation out of 33 clients placed as a consequence of Covid 19. Of these clients we have housed 13 long term.

For the remaining clients we continue to seek longer term resolutions wherever possible, and our Prevention Plus Team are working jointly with the Charity Porchlight and another service we ourselves have commissioned called Serveco, visiting our clients weekly providing ongoing support, planning and practical assistance, helping with their endeavours to secure a long term housing resolution, while our Homelessness Forum has been reconfigured to bring on board more of the supported housing accommodation providers in the area.

We are also now working with the Probation Service to potentially develop new services and improve outcomes for offenders leaving custody, and a potential new service provider is seeking to provide new accommodation with support on site for some of the most challenging and entrenched rough sleepers in the district, linking in with substance misuse and other support services.

At this time we have 28 clients in temporary accommodation overall including the 8 Covid placements as detailed above. This shows that

Folkestone and Hythe District Council has among the lowest levels of reliance upon temporary accommodation within the South East Region. While in the background we have seen a very large increase in demand, following the most significant change in homelessness statutory legislation since 1996 with the Homelessness Reduction Act becoming law.

In terms of forward planning we have put in place enhanced rough sleeper services, which have been highly effective and we are in discussion with a number of local charities and accommodation providers looking at new initiatives and how we can both accommodate and best support homeless people going forward.

These initiative are ongoing)

7. From Councillor Davison (answered by Councillor Monk)

What work is the district council doing to lobby the government to make sure our children don't go hungry by continuing and funding free school meals schemes during the summer holidays?

ANSWER:

It is for KCC to do this. If you wish to write to your KCC representative, this would be the best way to go about it.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

How are we going to make this practically happen within our district, and get the information to parents?

ANSWER:

As we do not administer this scheme, I will get an answer from KCC.

(Following the meeting, the following response was provided:

This is a national issue and the KRF (Kent Resilience Forum) will be pressing the government on the matter. The Council sits on a number of Community Cells run by the KRF and at yesterdays (15.06.20) meeting Jyotsna Leney who attended the meeting asked for more pressure to be put on the government through the relevant meetings between Chief Executives and the MHCLG. Other representatives from other District Councils also agreed on this point and so this is a matter that will be pushed forward through these forums.

KCC have been asked whether schools are providing packed lunches for pupils for example in the school holidays for parents to collect, however in terms of official announcements for the summer holiday the KCC Area Education Officer states:

The current position from government is that there will not be FSM vouchers over the holidays. Clearly increasing pressure from several places for them to change this, we shall see, but as it stands there won't be any.

In the meantime, KCC suggest families/parents access the current guidance: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/free-school-meals#tab-1>

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voucher-scheme-launches-for-schools-providing-free-school-meals?utm_source=1e8e0f2f-de27-4ddc-8bb7-4c57b4725211&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

KCC also point out that if a parent/carer believes their child/children are eligible for free school meals but are unaware what arrangements are in place for them they should contact their child's school in the first instance.

And if their child is not currently eligible for free school meals or they are waiting for a benefit application to be approved and need food and supplies urgently, they can contact Kent Together (<https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/coronavirus/kent-together>). Councils have been contacted to see if there is a way of recording the types of families receiving free food parcels from the community hubs or accessing the food banks, however this is not data that the hubs collect.

Additional info:

The fit and fed hunger programmes cannot currently go ahead at the various sports centres due to the Covid-19 situation, however early indications are that small scale projects could be started potentially with referrals from early help if schools are not open to provide names. Other enquiries are being made around the issue and we will update as soon as we can. Any vulnerable young person that is shielded will have received support from the governments free food parcel scheme however it is unclear how long this is to be managed in the future and KRF are working with MHCLG on this. The food banks remain open to those individuals that require them.

Cheriton Baptist Church, Urban Pastors working with the Salvation Army, are also looking into the FSMs issue to see if they can help provide for some.)

8. From Councillor Keen (answered by Councillor Monk)

I am receiving repeated pleas for help from residents, living close to, two large building developments. The complaints consist of excessive dust with little or no suppression, damage to neighbouring properties and excessive noise. There has been little or no communication between the developers and residents. These residents have sent complaints to the council which include several photos. Why, when there are repeated complaints, with

evidence, are our departments not supporting residents from the adverse effects of the building works, which pose a number of health hazards?

ANSWER:

With reference to the matters you raise at Marine Parade, I can confirm Environmental Health Pollution Team investigated allegations of statutory dust nuisances. We are aware of the issues regarding dust occurring from the Folkestone Sea Front development. The developer has been in contact with the residents regarding this issue and I understand there is a clear course of action.

A dust suppression is on site, in the form of a water bowser (water cannon). Unfortunately due to the nature and location of the works, dust will occur. We will continue to monitor the situation and respond to all complaints made to this authority.

In respect of the Royal Victoria Hospital, investigations have taken place and the Officer has made site visits and seen the Water Bowser on site where they are suppressing the dust and working very closely with the Council to keep us updated on any works being carried out. The Officer investigating this matter is happy to make contact with you directly to give a fuller update on this matter.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

If our officers are so convinced that these sites meet health and safety and environmental conditions, can you please explain why a site visit by an officer undertaken on 3 May, which was the basis of a written response to neighbours, when the site was not operating, as it was a Sunday? And in fact, no work started at the site until 14 May?

ANSWER

I will endeavour to provide this after the meeting.

(Following the meeting, the following response was provided:

The Officer made the visit on 1st June and not 3rd May, which was a typing error. He advised that they were operating that day and no dust issue was witnessed at the time).

9. From Councillor Keutenius (answered by Councillor Monk)

When district council approached Town and Parish councils to take on local Play Parks, why were the legal fees of this council added at the last hurdle for the town/parish councils to pay when it has been carried out by our in-house Legal team?

ANSWER:

The legal fees were not added at the last hurdle. When a new lease is entered into the associated fees are to be borne by the new tenant. This is standard practice within the Council and within local government.

In accordance with paragraph 2.8 of Part 8 of the Constitution, the Council's legal team has to apply the agreed charges set by the Council which can be found in the Discretionary Fees and Charges list for 2020-2021.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Would it be possible to see the breakdown of the costs of the legal fees?

ANSWER:

Yes, we can provide that answer. I am surprised the clerk is querying this, as it is standard practise and always has been.

(Following the meeting, the following answer was provided:

The fees and charges can be found on the Council's website

https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/media/1917/Fees-and-charges-2020-2021-discretionary/pdf/Discretionary_Fees_Charges_2020.21_Appendix_2.pdf?m=637219672417130000

As we have been dealing with multiple leases to the same Parish / Town Council which are in a similar form I have discounted the rates to £250 per lease whereas the minimum we would normally charge in accordance with the fee scale is £460.

The work involved for drafting a lease far exceeds the amount we collect and involves the following:-

- *Checking the title and producing a report on the title to ensure that we are able to grant a lease;*
- *Receiving the heads of terms and reviewing the same;*
- *Drafting the lease in accordance with the heads of terms and liaising with the instructing officer;*
- *Deducing title to the other side and dealing with any queries that might arise from the title;*
- *Sending the draft lease to the other side and negotiating any amendments sought (this can sometimes be long and protracted);*
- *Drafting and serving notices and declarations on the tenant to exclude the security of tenure provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954;*
- *Once the lease is agreed, preparing hard copy engrossments and sending to the other side for signature;*
- *Once the Tenant has signed the lease and declaration, arranging for the lease to be sealed by the Council;*

- *Liaising with the tenant for evidence of their public liability insurance and waiting for the relevant officer to confirm it is acceptable;*
- *Arranging for a suitable date to complete the lease. Dealing with completion and sending the lease out to the other side once completed.*
- *Post completion of the lease for us entails notifying relevant officers in the Council, scanning and filing the lease).*

10. From Councillor Meade (answered by Councillor Godfrey)

Given the critical urgency of the gas and electricity checks on EKH properties which has been ongoing and outstanding for some considerable time now, can the council please advise the percentage of homes that have now had these checks and remedial works carried out where necessary, given that they could be life saving for our residents ?

ANSWER:

We have been working very hard on this with our EKH colleagues. Since East Kent Housing's compliance failings were identified across the Councils housing stock, I can confirm that good progress has been made across the stock to deal with these issues. However, the Covid 19 Emergency has impacted on the progress of works inside individual homes.

Since the issues with gas certificates were brought under control last summer, our contractors have ensured that all properties have in nearly all cases had valid gas safety certificates in place, however in a few cases it has proved necessary to take enforcement action where tenants have failed to provide access for their annual service to be completed. As at 16 June, EKH advise that 13 properties in the district currently do not have a valid gas safety certificate. This is due entirely to the current Covid 19 Emergency and the tenants involved have advised that they are currently self-isolating and therefore unable to give access. EKH and our contractor continue to work closely with these tenants to enable the checks to be completed as soon as possible. The checks will be completed fully in line with the Government's Covid 19 guidance and we will take all necessary steps to ensure that our tenants and contractors are kept safe.

In terms of electrical safety, the Council has a contractor in place working to check electrical safety and to complete any necessary remedial works necessary in individual Council homes across the district. In line with good practice, all of the Council's homes will have had a five yearly electrical safety check completed by 31 March 2022. All electrical systems within the communal areas across the Council's housing stock, have been fully checked and no works are outstanding.

The Council and EKH continue to work closely with the Social Housing Regulator who has been kept fully up to date on our progress and the impact the current health emergency on this vital work.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can the electrical safety checks, scheduled for 2022, be pulled forward? This is critical in fire safety.

ANSWER:

Prior to commencing 5 year safety checks, we were only required to do 10 yearly checks, but we opted to do them five yearly. I will take this on board, and report back to the officers accordingly.

11. From Councillor Davison (answered by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee)

What work is the district council doing to respond to our community with respect to Black Lives Matter?

ANSWER:

The District Council is involved in local work around Black Lives Matter. Local awareness of any likely protests or other community tensions are relayed at relevant partnership meetings including the multi- agency weekly CSU. The partnership has dealt with any resilience needed to protect statues and on Friday 5th June an emergency IPAG (Police Independent Police Advisory Group) meeting was coordinated by the Council and representatives of many minority groups attended to discuss all relevant issues and considered what work needs to be done around communications and the importance of remaining involved in activities through interfaith week etc.

The Council also has its own Equality & Diversity Policy and carries out equality impact assessments on all key plans and policies to protect vulnerable groups including BAME etc.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

What positive work is the council doing, and what additional steps is the council taking in regard to the link between COVID-19 and the link between our BAME communities?

ANSWER:

I will seek advice on a response and come back to you.

(After the meeting, the following response was provided: Equality Impact (EIA) always include how vulnerable people are protected including BME. There will be consideration of the impact of COVID-19 within the EIA).

12. From Councillor Keen (answered by Councillor Monk)

Can we explain to residents why we are charging them for replacement bin`s that are broken by our contractors? On speaking to colleagues who sit on other District and Borough Councils across the South East, it appears we are possibly the most expensive for replacement bins. Also, one of the only councils that charge when the damage has been done by the contractor.

ANSWER:

The issue of replacement bin charging is regularly reviewed and considered by the Council and Cllr Keen will be pleased to know that the replacement bin budget was increased by a further £50,000 to £130,000 for this financial year. The budget however cannot be open-ended and restrictions need to be applied as is the common position with other councils. Replacement bin charges are comparable to other East Kent authorities in some cases less (e.g. 240L recycling bins).

How charges are applied is also important. The Council has always provided replacement recycling containers free of charge to domestic properties if lost or damaged on the collection day as this supports our environmental targets. We have also recently changed the policy to allow for the replacement of domestic residual waste bins when also lost or damaged on the collection day.

I understand you have recently raised a query related to the position on large bulk waste bin replacements for communal properties.

We have for several years now charged for the replacement of bulk waste bins. These are costly and the responsibility of landlords and managing agents to replace, who have often already charged their tenants within their service fees. The council takes a firm line on this but if it can be evidenced that a bulk bin has been damaged by the contractor it will be passed to them. In most cases however we find bulk bins have simply worn out by age and should be replaced by the landlord or managing agent.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

That is not my experience. I am referring to a resident with a shared smaller bulk bin. It was broken on the day of collection, and reported by one of the residents, who was told they had to pay for it.

ANSWER:

Please provide the details, and I will get this looked into.

13. From Councillor Keutenius (answered by Councillor Monk)

When will the district council re-instate full council meetings (virtually) and schedule the AGM which was due in May?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Keutenius for your question. We are aware that some Cllrs are keen for Full Council meetings to resume. So far, since lockdown we have not had any Council business which has needed Full Council approval. We are keeping this matter under review and are aiming to hold our next Full Council meeting in September. I am hoping that we will be in a position to hold this meeting in the Chamber (provided we can comply with any required social distancing measures and health and safety measures). With regard to Full Council please note the emergency legislation introduced by Parliament during this Pandemic allows LA's to postpone their AGM meeting until further notice. We will of course hold the AGM as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

14. From Councillor McConville (answered by Councillor Godfrey)

We are getting a lot of reports from residents in EKH properties from rat infestations to extreme damp issues. At what level of functionality are our housing contractors and when will residents see a quicker response from them?

ANSWER:

We are aware that there has been a number of rat infestations cases reported by tenants over the last few months. In terms of our contractors response to these issues, I can confirm that a complaint of this type **would** be considered as a **priority** issue by our contractor. Our contractor would also need to bring a specialist pest control company on board to deal with the infestation, but it can take some time for the problem to be fully resolved. We would then expect EKH to closely monitor the position and address any performance issues with our contractor.

We have been alerted to a dampness problem in a small number of Council homes in the district. One in particular Councillor Keen has kindly brought to the attention of my attention. In this case we have requested that East Kent Housing carry out a further inspection of the property concerned so that the issues the tenant is experiencing can be resolved as soon as possible. In cases involving dampness, it is often necessary to bring in a specialist surveyor to assess a property and provide a long-term solution.

Going forward we will continue to work with tenants to further improve the housing and repairs service as it returns to the Council. We intend to provide all tenants with an exemplary service, as we put in place our new procedures.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Do we have updated risk assessments and new ways of working from our contractors, and if so, can we see them?

ANSWER:

I will ask our officers to provide this.

(Following the meeting, the following response was provided: EKH continue to work with our contractors to update their service risk assessments. The assessments are updated on an ongoing basis to ensure that they take full account of any changes in Government Guidance. The risk assessments cover the following areas:

- *Office working environment*
- *Routine external repairs*
- *Emergency Repairs*
- *Close working arrangements*
- *Routine internal repairs).*

15. From Councillor McConville (answered by Councillor Wimble)

Local businesses have had a small lifeline with regards to the business grant scheme and thank the work of the council in getting that money from central government to those businesses in such a quick fashion. What initiatives, if any, has the council planned to expand on those lifelines and enable businesses to remain trading in the long term?

ANSWER:

I think the council made a very big step to help local businesses very quickly.

The Council has been administering the Small Business Grant (SBG) and Retail Hospitality & Leisure Grant (RHLG) that the Government announced in May and more recently has established a local authority discretionary business grant scheme to distribute the further £1.2million 'top-up' that the government has allocated to Folkestone & Hythe to help other businesses that did not qualify for the earlier scheme. The earlier scheme has now distributed some 99% of funds and the discretionary scheme is well underway with 44 grant approvals worth some £350,000 since its launch on the 1st June.

The council is well aware of the long term problems that many local businesses are facing as a result of the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. To this end we introduced a new business support programme for independent retailers early on in the crisis back in March. This is supporting businesses, particularly independent retailers, to look at alternative ways to trade, including through on-line platforms and helping them to consider how to further develop their business over the long term.

The question of how the council can support our businesses over the longer term to recover is one of the key areas being addressed in the council's Recovery Plan which is being led by Ewan Green, the council's new

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Director of Place. Although the detail is still being worked up at this stage, we envisage that one component of the work will be the introduction of new business support programmes, in addition to those that the council is already providing. These will be aimed at both supporting our existing businesses to recover, as well as helping our residents who might have recently lost their jobs to consider starting a new business. We already have a business 'scale-up' support programme that commenced in 2019 and this will continue this year. However, the focus of this is likely to change for some, to first help the business recover, and then to continue on their path to growth.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.