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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, 28 February 2024**

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Bridget Chapman and David Godfrey

#### 79. **Declarations of Interest**

The following Councillors made declarations in respect of the agenda item relating to the Draft Housing Revenue Account Revenue and capital original budget 2024/25:

- Councillors Cooper and Fuller both made Declarations of Pecuniary interest in that they were local authority housing tenants. They both indicated that they would leave the chamber during the consideration of this item.
- Councillors Butcher, Wing, Lockwood and Goddard made voluntary declarations in respect of their roles as Directors of Oportunitas. All four Members had been granted dispensations by the Audit and Governance Committee.

The following Councillors made declarations in respect of the agenda item relating to the Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy, Capital Programme, Reserves and Balances, Treasury and Investment Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax for 2024/25:

- Councillors Meade and Hills made voluntary declarations due to their role as Kent County Councillors.

#### 80. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chair.

#### 81. **Chair's Communications**

The Chair gave the following communications:

“Since my last communication I have been honoured to continue to act as an ambassador of the district within our towns and villages and across Kent. I take my role very seriously and try to say yes to every engagement because I relish any opportunity to tell people about this beautiful district that I love. But also I

want to help to fundraise by way of my contributions to the many well-deserving charities that the mayors support.

Last month, I had been feeling rather off for a couple of days but I was loathe to renege on any promises that I had already made and therefore carried on my week as usual filling it with work, family life as a single mother, my roles as both a district and town councillor, my work as a charity owner and my engagements as chair of the district council and deputy mayor of Folkestone. It came to the end of the week and I was in attendance at an evening engagement in Faversham. I was feeling lethargic and had a persistent and pounding headache. I tried to carry on as usual but everyone kept on telling me, in of course, the kindest and most compassionate way they could, that I did not look good! In fact I looked unwell and should go home and rest. They were of course right! I went home early that night and then stayed in bed for two weeks recovering. Yes, it was that bad and yes, I was that ill. In that time I had to cancel several engagements and I also missed the last full council, Thank you to my vice-chair Cllr Jones for covering for me. I was told that you did exceptionally well and I am excited about what you will achieve next year in this role.

Anyone who knows me well knows that I may not be physically active but when it comes to mental agility and sheer volume of work including meetings and engagements I am at least the equivalent of an Olympic triple gold medalist. But as Audre Lorde said "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

I am the sum of all my thoughts deeds and actions but the physical manifestation of who I am exists within this body. Without this body I cease to exist so it is essential that I preserve and I indulge it in not only activities that help the world external to my body but also activities that help me as a individual, nurture me and my physical, mental and spiritual needs. Because without this body I would not be able to do any of the things listed above.

It is essential that we do not lose sight of our health in pursuit of action and fear of missing out. There will always be another day, there will always be new things to do but there will never ever, in the full entirety of the universe ever be anybody like you again. I am now learning to say no, on occasion, and I hope you too can find new ways to say no that mean a yes for your health. This was not part of what I originally wrote, but on my way here, I witnessed a traffic accident. I was overwhelmed by the number of people standing around the elderly woman, talking to her, reassuring her, and redirecting traffic the traffic. That is the sort of people we have in Folkestone, and I am proud of this. Whether you are in this chamber or watching at home, take care of yourself as you are very precious".

82. **Petitions**

There were no petitions.

**83. Questions from the Public**

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

**84. Questions from Councillors**

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

**85. Announcements of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader gave the following announcements:

“I want to welcome the newly elected member for Romney Marsh to the Chamber. Tony Hills brings a wealth of experience and knowledge, particularly in all matter pertaining to flooding in the district. I am always very grateful for Tony's advice.

1. I joined the personnel committee for their final deliberations on this year's pay award. I then chaired the meeting with the union representatives and staff representatives to discuss. The negotiations were frank and fair, I was very impressed by the professional approach of all members of the negotiating teams and hope that the recommendation will be accepted.
2. The leaders of the four political groups and Independent Councillor Paul Thomas have been meeting regularly as we move towards a committee system.
3. I have attended many meetings regarding Otterpool Park with government agencies, and developers, these discussions continue.
4. I attended a meeting with many other Council representatives in my role as Armed Forces Champion.
5. I have been visiting businesses in the District as usual, hotels, hospitality and Chartered Surveyors. Business holds some very interesting perspectives on the future of the District. This Council is a friend to good business.
6. Princes Parade hoarding: I am delighted to announce that the hoarding surrounding the Princes Parade site will shortly be dismantled. I am also delighted to announce that the hoardings and the concrete blocks that support it will be recycled to Otterpool, where they will be stored and used as required. Once the site is refenced we will be consulting next year to ask local people for their views on the future of Prince's Parade.
7. My regular contact with Stagecoach continues, this month we will begin the work on our joint "use it or lose it" campaign to encourage people to use the bus service.
8. Councillor Scoffham and I attended a presentation by Southern Water regarding the declining bathing water quality around our coast. I have

been in regular contact with Southern Water and held meetings with them, mainly because of the sewage on the Copperfield's Estate in Lydd, the flooding on Udan Rd in Dymchurch and the failure of the pumps at the Range Road pumping station in Hythe. I have a further meetings with Southern Water, the Environment Agency and KCC Councillors this month.

9. Along with many coastal District Councils I continue to attend a monthly meeting organised by the Environment Agency to collectively express our shared concern about Southern Water's consistent failure to meet the needs of their customers.
10. I have attended the Kent Leaders Forum to discuss the issues which affect the Council's in Kent. I have also attended meetings of the East Kent Leaders forum which has a more focused view of the issues affecting the East Kent Districts.
11. I spent a morning with the team responsible for our sheltered housing and was so very impressed with the dedication and commitment of the Council's staff.
12. I accompanied our excellent Homes in Multiple Occupation team, to carry out a licencing inspection. Essential work, carried out with a high degree of professionalism and empathy by our Council team.
13. I have held meetings with local charities and agencies including Citizens Advice, Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds, local Business Groups, local Community Groups.
14. I was pleased to talk to the students at East Kent College about the future of the District and potential career opportunities.
15. I attended the brilliant Youth Speaks event at Brockhill School, along with Councillors Belinda Walker and Anita Jones in their respective roles as Mayors of Folkestone and Hythe. Great thanks to the local Rotary Clubs who work so hard to put the event on.

I am minded to write to David Cameron and ask him to support the call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. This will allow for the opening of humanitarian corridors which will allow food, water and medical supplies to be provided. I will also request the immediate release of the hostages and prisoners, together with an arms embargo to allow the people of Gaza to resume their daily lives.

I will be writing my letter on Friday and I will be happy to add the name of any Councillor who wishes to express these sentiments to the Foreign Secretary.

I began my announcements, welcoming our newly elected member for Romney Marsh, I will close by saying good bye to one. I represented FHDC, this month, at the funeral of Michael Lyons. Michael served as a District Councillor, a Hythe Town Councillor and Speaker of the Cinque Ports, he gave much of himself to his community, always with generosity, politeness and good humour. Our District is a poorer place without him.

One final thing, if I may Chair, I just wanted to say a few words about Sue Lewis – our guide, our helper and our problem solver. Sue is one of the most organised and communicative officers within the council, and sadly she is leaving after 36 years of outstanding service. In 36 years, Sue has seen many Leaders and many Councillors and has been helpful to all of them. On behalf of all Councillors present and past, thank you for your service to the people of Folkestone and Hythe.”

Councillor McConville, Leader of the Labour Group then responded to the announcements and stated that he wished to particularly focus on the Youth Speaks event that was mentioned. He stated that hopefully the council would have a louder voice for the younger people in our district. At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee last night, the committee had discussed the idea of a youth council, and he was pleased to say that work will continue and he looked forward to the responses on further engagement work on this matter. In respect of the letter, He then read out what was voted on in the House of Commons last week. It was a Labour amendment to an SNP motion, so which he suggested might give a bit more emphasis on the Leaders sentiments to write:

*“That this House believes that an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah risks catastrophic humanitarian consequences and therefore must not take place; notes the intolerable loss of Palestinian life, the majority being women and children;*

*This house condemns the terrorism of Hamas who continue to hold hostages;*

*This house supports Australia, Canada and New Zealand’s calls for Hamas to release and return all hostages and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which means an immediate stop to the fighting and a ceasefire that lasts and is observed by all sides, noting that Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence and that Israelis have the right to the assurance that the horror of 7th October cannot happen again;*

*This house therefore supports diplomatic mediation efforts to achieve a lasting ceasefire; demands that rapid and unimpeded humanitarian relief is provided in Gaza;*

*This house also demands an end to settlement expansion and violence; urges Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice's provisional measures;*

*This house also calls for the UN Security Council to be meet urgently;*

*And urges all international partners to work together to establish a diplomatic process to deliver the peace of a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian state, including working with international partners to recognise a Palestinian state as a contribution to rather than outcome of that process, because statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and not in the gift of any neighbour”.*

He stated that this was voted on, and he thanked all the MPs who voted for this statement. He asked those at home to write to our local MP and implore him to ask his government to support what was agreed in the House of Commons last week.

He then wished Sue Lewis all the best in everything she does, and stated that she would be missed.

Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee also responded to the announcements, and welcomed Councillor Tony Hills. She stated that she was delighted he had made such an impression down on the Marsh, and as Councillor Martin had said, he would be a great addition in terms of his knowledge of the Marsh and flood issues. She added that she was also part of the negotiations on the pay award, and supported what the Leader had said. In terms of Otterpool, which she stated was close to her heart, as one of the few Councillors who voted in support of it initially, and as the Leader had mentioned, many other districts were jealous of the asset. Of course, businesses were important to the area. Without businesses, there would be no employment. In terms of Princes Parade, she stated that she was disappointed that the council were spending large amounts of money to erect another fence in the place of an existing fence. Until consultation has taken place, this seemed ridiculous. She asked that when the consultation took place, it would not be just restricted to parks and gardens and wildlife, but an open consultation across the district. She welcomed the comments on Southern Water and the Environment agency, and supported the comments about the housing team, who work extremely hard in challenging circumstances, particularly in respect of homelessness. She stated that she was glad to hear the leader is having conversations with the Citizens Advice Bureau and she hoped the district would continue to support with the grant. In terms of

schools, anything the council could do to get them involved and understanding how the district works would be beneficial. She added that many people don't understand the different tiers of local government, and it was difficult to get this message through to people. In respect of Gaza, she stated that it was very disconcerting when someone disrupts a meeting when Members were trying to carry out the business of this council. She added that the Conservative Group would do what they wish to do individually. In respect of the passing of Councillor Lyons, she was disappointed that there had not been a minutes silence, as per usual protocol, and she asked if this could take place at the next meeting. She added that he was a character and members loved him in this chamber, particularly on the planning committee. She extended her thoughts to his brother and his family. She then stated that she was probably the person who has known Sue Lewis the longest, and that Sue was always smiling, and always willing to support. She added that she was good at leaving her mobile phone and laptop in the chamber, and Sue would look after it until it could be returned. She wished Sue the very best for the future, and thanked her for all she had done for all Members, and Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee personally.

The Leader of the Council was then given an opportunity to sum up, but advised he had run out of words!

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

**RESOLVED:**

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

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

During the Leaders announcements, there was a disturbance to the meeting. The Chair of the Council therefore adjourned the meeting. The meeting was subsequently reconvened after a period of 50 minutes.

**86. Portfolio Holder reports to Council**

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

**87. Opposition Business**

Councillor McConville advised that due to the earlier disturbance at the meeting creating a delay in proceedings, he wished to defer his opposition business to the next meeting of the Council.

88. **Motions on Notice**

There were no motions on notice.

89. **Draft Housing Revenue Account Revenue and capital Original Budget 2024/25**

The report set out the Housing Revenue Account ('HRA') Revenue and Capital Budget for 2024/25 for approval and proposes an increase in weekly rents and an increase in service charges for 2024/25 both for approval.

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

**RESOLVED:**

1. That Report A/23/25 be received and noted.
2. That the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2024/25 be approved. (Refer to paragraph 2.1 and Appendix 1)
3. That the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme budget 2024/25 be approved. (Refer to paragraph 4.1 and Appendix 2)
4. That the increase in rents of dwellings within the HRA on average by £7.37 per week, representing a 7.7% increase with effect from 1 April 2024 be approved (Refer to paragraph 3.2)
5. That the increase in rents of shared ownership dwellings within the HRA by 9.4% (RPI 8.9% + 0.5%), with effect from 1 April 2024, be approved (Refer to paragraph 3.2)
6. That the increase in service charges be approved. (Refer to section 3.5)
7. That the Housing Revenue Account 30-year Business Plan 2023/24-2033/34 be approved (refer to section 5 and Appendix 3).

In accordance with the council procedure rule 17.5, five members present demanded a recorded vote.

FOR: Councillors M Blakemore, P Blakemore, Butcher, Holgate, Jones, E Martin, J Martin, Prater, Scoffham, Shoob, Speakman, and Wing (12).

AGAINST: None (0).

ABSTENTIONS: Councillors Akuffo-Kelly, Davison, Goddard, Mrs Hollingsbee, Hills, Keen, Lockwood, A Martin, McConville, McShane, Meade, Thomas, Walker and Wimble (14).

(Voting figures: 12 for, 0 against, 14 abstentions).



*(Councillors Fuller and Cooper had declared an interest in this matter at the beginning of the meeting, and left the council chamber during the debate, and vote).*

90. **Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy, Capital Programme, Reserves and Balances, Treasury and Investment Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax for 2024/25**

Following consideration by Cabinet at their meeting of the 28<sup>th</sup> February the report concluded the budget setting process for 2024/25 and was submitted to Council with the proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy, Capital Programme, Reserves and Balances, Treasury and Investment Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy. It set out recommendations for setting the Council Tax after taking into account the district's Council Tax requirement (including town and parish council requirements and special expenses in respect of the Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Charity), the precepts of Kent County Council, the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner, and the Kent Fire & Rescue Service.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance advised that Cabinet, during their meeting earlier in the evening, had made an additional recommendation related to Members Allowances, details of which are appended to this minutes.

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

**RESOLVED:**

1. That report A/23/24 be received and noted.
2. That the District Council's Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Statement, Capital Programme, Investment Strategy, Annual Treasury Management for 2024/25 as presented in Appendices 1,4,5,7, & 8 to this report be approved.
3. That a Council Tax rate of £280.08 at Band D be set, representing an increase of £8.01 on the current charge.
4. That the Council Tax Resolution at Appendix 2 of the report be approved.
5. That the additional recommendation from Cabinet relating to the uprating of Member Allowances, as appended to the minutes, be agreed.

The motion was put to a recorded vote in accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 as set out below:

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**FOR:** Councillors M Blakemore, P Blakemore, Butcher, Fuller, Holgate, Jones, E Martin, J Martin, Prater, Scoffham, Shoob, Speakman and Wing (13).

**AGAINST:** Councillors Goddard, Mrs Hollingsbee, Hills, A Martin and Wimble (5).

**ABSTENTIONS:** Councillors Akuffo-Kelly, Cooper, Davison, Keen, Lockwood, McConville, McShane, Meade, Thomas and Walker (10).

(Voting figures: 13 for, 5 against, 10 abstentions).

## Council – 28 February 2024

### Public Questions:

1. **From Bryan Rylands to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness**

Landlords who neglect to carry out an EICR (along with any suggested work) prior to the start of a new tenancy may face a fine of up to £30,000. The enforcement of these regulations falls under the jurisdiction of local authorities, as outlined in the Housing Act 2004. How Many Landlords has the Council used the 2004 Housing ACT against for failure to carry out an EICR prior to rental or after rental?

#### **ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question.

The Private Sector Housing Team deal with electrical safety issues through the course of their tenant complaint investigations in private rented properties. Generally, most landlords are able to produce an EICR when requested (in compliance of the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020) and those that do not have one in place, once requested have instructed an electrician to carry out the electric test inspection and any hazards highlighted have been addressed in a timely manner. Some landlords automatically send them to the council and the PSH team check these when received. Any visible electrical faults found during HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System) inspections are reported to the landlord and if not remedied in a timely manner, subsequent enforcement action is taken under the Housing Act 2004 in the form of an improvement notice. Part of the schedule of work for any electrical hazard remedy would always ask for a new test report to be provided as evidence of the safety of the electrical installation after the remedial works having been carried out. Those landlords who fail to remedy any hazard listed on an improvement notice (possibly including electrics) are served with a civil penalty notice (of up to £30,000) or prosecuted in a magistrate's court. Since the inception of the council's civil penalty policy on January 2021, the PSH team have served 8 civil penalty notices totalling £34,370 in fines.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

How many landlords has the council used for MEES (this is the EPC rulings against for failure to provide an EPC, either before the tenancy or after the tenancy)?

#### **ANSWER:**

I will provide a written response after the meeting.

*After the meeting, the following information was provided:*

*The requirement to provide an EPC is enforced by the local weights and measures authority (i.e KCC Trading Standards) therefore this question would need to be directed at them.*

*However, the council are responsible for the enforcement of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) whereby all rented properties must achieve a minimum of EPC grade E. In the course of housing condition complaint investigations we have not come across any F or G rated properties and therefore not had to take any enforcement action under MEES to date.*

## Council – 28 February 2024

### Councillor Questions:

#### 1. **From Councillor Lockwood to Councillor M Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

As you are aware Kent County Council has taken the decision to end the commission of youth services in Kent. 'Salus', to whom KCC subcontract the running of youth provision, want to continue to operate the Hythe Youth Centre, which has over 800 members from across the district, and remain responsible for the Safeguarding procedures at youth clubs at New Romney and Lympne. They are actively trying to secure alternative sources of funding. Does FHDC have any plans to offer support for vital youth services across the district?

#### **ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Lockwood, and I share these concerns.

Whilst the council recognises the importance of working with young people and engaging with them on the delivery of key services regrettably, we cannot step in and fund KCC services, in part, due to our own financial position.

We will continue to work with KCC through the Local Children's Partnership Group for Folkestone and Hythe as their family hub model develops and we always look at ways of supporting young people on joint projects or other initiatives, for example, through the Folkestone and Hythe Community Safety Partnership, local sports and leisure providers and the District Food Network.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can I request you connect with Jane Darling on this matter?

#### **ANSWER:**

Yes, I would be happy to.

#### 2. **From Councillor Keen to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness**

Although I take on board the lack of council housing in the district, is it appropriate to place families with small children in house on age designated estates where the properties are cramped and have very little secure outside space?

#### **ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Keen. Generally speaking, all council homes are allocated via the Choice Based Lettings system Kent HomeChoice

and an applicant will only be offered a property if they have chosen to bid for it and are eligible to do so.

The Housing service do not have 'age designated estates' we have only have some age designated blocks, or individual units. For instance at Warren Close, although the flats are age designated, all the houses are General Needs. The houses all have private back gardens.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can you look at Warren Close again? In the flats that are age designated, there are people under 40 living, and they are making it difficult for the elderly residents.

**ANSWER:**

Very happy to take that up after the meeting.

*After the meeting, the following additional response was provided:*

*Age designated properties will normally be allocated to those aged 50 or over, or those under 50 with medical assessment who require this type of accommodation. Although in areas of lower demand some properties designated for older people may be advertised without an age restriction. We are not aware of any recent incidents that are making it difficult for elderly residents. If Cllr Keen could let our Neighbourhood Management team know of any specific incidents we will investigate this?*

**3. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness**

Could it please be explained why we as a council find it appropriate to place families with babies, newborns and children in temporary accommodation where they are not allowed to take washing machines and freezers? These families are often in this accommodation for over a year and sometimes longer. Launderettes are expensive and these families are more often than not fleeing domestic violence, economically challenged and time consuming if you are fitting them in around children and work.

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Keen. I do appreciate that living in temporary accommodation can be an extremely difficult time for households who are affected by homelessness. Unfortunately, due to the nature and limited supply of temporary accommodation available at short notice, it is often not possible to provide washing machines and freezers in the accommodation, although, we will always provide fridges and ovens for cooking. The accommodation is intended to be short-term and due to the work of our Housing Options Team, on average, households spend less than 4-months in temporary accommodation before moving on into permanent accommodation.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

I meant for those people who want to take their own washing machines and fridge freezers to the properties. Often young mums freeze their breast milk. Most people we accommodate are on limited or low wages, and can't afford to go to the launderette or buy food in small packets, and the accommodation has got space for the appliances, so why aren't we allowing them to take their own goods into the properties?

**ANSWER:**

Happy to take this up if you provide specific examples.

*After the meeting, the following information was provided:*

*Unfortunately, it would not be practical for residents to take their own washing machines into Temporary Accommodation properties as often properties are let at short notice and space is often limited. In addition, we are not able to confirm if individual properties have the appropriate connections to install a washing machine, and the council aren't able to verify if any such private installation is safe and won't cause damage to the accommodation. If Cllr Keen is able to supply us with any specific cases where residents are struggling to manage in TA, we will of course do everything we can to assist and advise individuals.*

**4. From Councillor Keen to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control**

The Road of Remembrance where we recently had the landslip, and where over the years there have been several near misses for drivers and pedestrians alike. Could I ask that we speak with KCC and either make this road one way or we have it pedestrianised ?

**ANSWER**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Keen.

Officers have been working closely with Kent County Council following the original landslip on 27th January. KCC as the highway authority have closed the road for public safety until the slip area is cleared.

There have been further significant slips over last weekend and on Monday this week. Timescales for clearance work are unknown at this time as the safety of people working in the area has to take priority. Officers will provide further updates to members in due course.

Officers have made contact with the East Kent Highway Improvements Team and asked them to consider your request to either make the road one way or have it pedestrianised. They will consider any road safety and accident data

that they have available when considering this proposal. Officers will update you when they hear back from the East Kent Highway Improvements Team

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**5. From Councillor Keen to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

Could we have an have an update on what the yearly cost of the Otterpool site is, staff salaries , directors fees etc?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Keen.

As Members will recall, in October 2023 Cabinet agreed the outcomes of an in-depth management review of the Otterpool Park project, which I completed along with the support of external advisors and senior officers. In summary, the outcome of the review was that we should seek to progress the delivery of Otterpool Park through a strategic joint venture partnership and that, as we worked through the process to secure a partner, an 18-month transition plan and budget would be put in place for Otterpool Park LLP (the LLP).

The development of the LLP budget has been subject to the same rigorous scrutiny that all Council projects and services have been through as we prepared the budget, with a focus on identifying only essential spend for the expected 18-month transition period. This has included a review of the staff resource required for this period.

Subject to the decisions to be taken on the Council's budget later this evening, the 18-month operating budget for the LLP will be circa £9.95m. As per the Cabinet decision last October, this has been agreed by the S151 officer, in consultation with me as Leader, and is within the overall budget which the Council has already set aside for the project. To answer the specifics of your question, the budget includes:

£964,000 for site related costs;  
£1,607,000 for staff salaries; and  
£45,000 for director remuneration.

Once agreed, updates on the LLP transition plan and budget will be included in regular finance monitoring reports to the Finance and Performance Sub Committee, Cabinet and the Otterpool Park Owners' meeting. Work to secure investment into the project through a joint venture partnership will be the subject of reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in due course. I would like to add that today is a big day. I can't give any information at present, but this is very positive.



**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Could you inform the council if the Councillors who sit on the Board of Otterpool Park LLP receive an additional SRA?

**ANSWER:**

**Yes, my understanding is that the board members do receive an SRA.**

**(The Chief Executive then confirmed that the members on the Board are entitled to receive an SRA if they wish to, but if they receive an SRA for another role within the council, they can only select to receive one).**

**6. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Otterpool Park**

Given the Developer has appealed the Planning Committees decision to refuse outline planning permission at High Knocke, the people of Dymchurch want to know if the district council will be supporting them and be contesting the Developers Planning Appeal to the Inspector?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Cooper.

As a member of the Planning and Licensing Committee I am sure you will appreciate that the appeal is subject of a statutory legal process. All I will therefore say is that the Planning Committees' reasons for refusal will be defended robustly in any appeal process or hearing.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Councillor Cooper advised that if anyone is affected by this appeal, he would advise them to write to the inspector.

**7. From Councillor A Martin to Councillor M Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

During last month's debate on the motion to delay introduction of the committee system I heard a number of members express the view that this change is something residents are strongly passionate about. Given the extremely poor attendance at the public meeting, and low response to the consultation – Is it fair to assume that this topic is of no interest to the public or does the council have a problem with how it engages with residents?

**ANSWER**

Thank you for your question, Councillor A Martin.

As you rightly say, when council last met several members in this chamber highlighted public interest in this subject and I am keen we do all we can to engage with the residents.

I took part in the open public session and numbers were lower than expected. However, the fact that there was an invitation to the public to contribute to the debate, and that the meetings of the member working group, which steers the move to a committee system, can be viewed online is an example of the commitment of this Administration to improve engagement on this important subject.

To your wider point, I do not believe this Council has a problem with how it engages with residents. This Administration is actively championing the need for better engagement on local issues and doing more than this Council has ever done to ensure residents' views are taken on board across a wide range of issues.

I am aware that Members are actively meeting with communities across the district, which represents a significant step forward for the Council, including the creation of community forum in Folkestone. North Downs ward councillors have established their own forum and, along with my fellow Cheriton councillors, I am involved in setting up a similar forum in my own ward. Our work to engage on regeneration projects has also stepped up a level, for example the methods of consultation employed for the Folkestone: A Brighter Future project have been extremely well received, with young people and schools better at the core of the engagement. Last night, Overview & Scrutiny agreed we should explore further the possibility of establishing a Youth Forum.

I am positive about the Council's approach to engagement with residents across the district but do think that we can continue to improve on the excellent progress this administration has made. If Members have views on how this might be achieved, then I would be very pleased to hear from them.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

If we don't have a problem with engagement, and are doing lots to encourage positive engagement, why is the public not interested in the topic of moving to a committee system?

**ANSWER:**

There could be lots of reasons for this. I've worked in communications for much of my career, and that involves a lot of different ways to engage and consult with people. On some subjects it is easier than others. I'm sure you can think of examples where residents engage fully, ie buses, parking. On others we have to work harder. I think this is what we are doing and should continue to do. I'm happy to hear other ideas on how we can do that.

8. **From Councillor A Martin to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

I am pleased to see the ongoing engagement with Southern Water in relation to the various issues with sewage and pumping stations. Is there an opportunity within these discussions to raise the topic of the treatment plants and pumping stations that the council inherited from East Kent Housing and are currently under the management of the council on the Marsh? These create a significant cost and management burden to us, and arguably Southern Water are better placed to take ownership of them.

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor A Martin. The issue of drainage at the Marsh is complex, and I'm happy to explain later.

Originally the sewage systems you refer to would have served the council owned properties across the marsh and other rural areas within the district. Over time a number of properties have been bought under the RTB, leading to the numbers shown in the table I will send to you (See appendix 1 attached).

All the properties which have been sold by the council have clauses within the title deeds which mean that they have to contribute to the cost of maintaining (repairs etc) the systems which they are connected to. The clauses within the title deeds differ throughout the periods for which they have been sold, but mainly say the same thing. The only exception is 12 houses at Moore Close that were built in the early 1990's for a housing association and are now owned by Southern Housing. The titles for those properties are slightly different.

The cost of the service varies depending on works required and the number of properties connected to the individual system. For the 2024/25 year, the costs vary between £432.19 to £1372.00 (capped) per property. Without the cap, the true cost for the most expensive system per property would be £2434.44.

Since the council housing service came back in-house Officers have been trying to have a meaningful dialogue with Southern Water regarding the pumping stations and water treatment works that currently fall into our remit on the Marsh. Unfortunately, Southern Water continue to maintain that these systems are not eligible for adoption. The difficulty remains that none of the facilities pump into Southern Water sewer, but into a 'private network' owned by the Council. They have stated that even if they were to put in a mains sewer scheme and these assets were connected to it rather than the treatment works, they still would not be adoptable as the DEFRA criteria requires that they be connected as of 1 July 2011 to be eligible. These discussions with Southern Water continue.

Long-term management of the sewerage service on the Marsh will need to be reviewed as part of the service charge de-pooling exercise that is currently being carried out, as in some cases we have a small number of tenants alongside a number of private owners benefitting from this service. In some instances there is a lack of equity in the service charges levied with some historical capping of costs applied, which means that the council is not

receiving all income due to it in the management and maintenance of these pumping stations, which as indicated above is a burden to the HRA and the council.

So in answer to your question Councillor Martin, I agree these systems create a significant cost and management burden to us, and, indeed, arguably Southern Water may be better placed to take ownership of them but currently they do not agree.

I will attach a list of properties that connect into the sewage/waste water systems that come under the HRA with my written answer.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**9. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

It has been brought to my attention the Dymchurch Dippers Sea Swimming Group have had to advise their members it was not advisable to go into the sea due to continued discharge of sewage water across the Bay. Could you please advise on the actions the council is taking on:

1. Putting pressure on Southern Water to upgrade the sewage plants on the Marsh and to stop them polluting our beaches.
2. Querying why is Hythe being upgraded and not the Romney Marsh.
3. Notifying people and others to ensure the residents of and visitors to the Romney Marsh are updated about the beaches and sea water standards.

and finally, would you please call a public meeting and invite the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Local Parish Councils and concerned local stake holders to come along in order to work together to try to resolve these and similar matters?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Cooper.

I think that there is a shared concern across the council and it our community generally about the performance of Southern Water and its management and investment in the local water infrastructure. The council has actively and at times robustly raised these concerns at a regional and local level with Southern Water and the Environment Agency, who have the regulatory responsibility. We now have regular engagement with Southern Water and Cllr Cooper recently attended one of these meetings. As you know I signed a letter to OFWAT recently along with many other District Councils across the South of England asking OFWAT to take legal action against Southern Water for consistent failure to meet their customer needs.

I have asked officers to contact Southern Water for a specific update on your first two points related to the upgrading of sewage plants on the Marsh and in Hythe. I will ask them to share the response with you when received. As far as I currently know, and you will also know this from the Southern Water presentation, the problems around Littlestone may be associated with leaking Cess Pits. Southern Water have offered to renew these Cess Pits. Elsewhere, Southern Water have been relining sewers and finding illegal connections and disconnecting them. The problems, however, persist. The latest testing included species markers to try and establish if the E.coli in the sea came from livestock, this extensive testing showed sea bird and human traces in every sample and while there were traces of most livestock these were at very low levels and intermittent. The current thinking is the problem is from human sources.

On your third point about notification, the council is required to update the bathing water quality signage at beaches if the classification changes in time for the start of bathing season in May. This is completed by the Environmental Protection Team, who have changed the main notice at Littlestone, and will be updating the other signs along the beach shortly. Further to this we have recently renewed all of the beach signage and included QR codes which when scanned take the user directly to the Beachbuoy app with live water quality information for that location.

In response to your last point about a public meeting with Southern Water and Environment Agency. I believe that a meeting is being arranged by Southern Water and the EA to which the council has already committed. We are expecting details soon and these will be shared with members.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can I just make an observation? There is a lot of concern around the testing by the environment agency, that the information doesn't go onto beach buoy, and about the adverse effect that these tests will have during the summer, especially on next season. There are a lot of businesses and people out there who want action, not words.

**ANSWER:**

I share all of those concerns, they are very real and pertinent.

10. **From Councillor Davison to Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy**

Please could we have an update about the medical centre that was proposed for the Victorian part of Folca (formerly Debenhams)?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Davison.

The provision of a new medical centre remains a priority for the Council (and partners) along with ensuring that the whole of the Folca building is brought back into a positive use for the town centre. The local GP practices leading the medical centre project, and Integrated Care Board, are working together with the Council to bring this ambitious project to fruition. I don't have details to share yet but there will be a full Member and community engagement in due course.

In parallel we are working up plans for the redevelopment of the Folca 2 building (the art deco fronted building), including proposals for the Council to relocate to there from the current Civic Centre site. This proposal will also include the potential for other public sector agencies to be based in Folca and options for commercial leisure use.

Folkestone: A Brighter Future (the £22m Levelling Up Fund project) includes circa £2m spend for initial works that are required for the 1st phase of the redevelopment of Folca 2, no matter what the building will be used for in the future, and we have a design team working on this at present. Works are planned to start in summer 2024 subject to the relevant approvals.

These are complex projects and do take time to come forward. It is intended that we will take a report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then Cabinet through April and May 2024 setting out proposals for Folca and the medical centre.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can you clarify if other sites are being looked at for the potential medical centre?

**ANSWER:**

Yes they are.

**11. From Councillor Davison to Councillor M Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

Please could we have some more details about the work of the Folkestone Community Forum - for example topics that have been discussed and work that is taking place?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Davison.

Folkestone is undergoing a dramatic period of change. At the heart of this will be the £20 million levelling up fund regeneration of the town centre, a new future for the Folca building, along with the seafront, harbour and Ship Street developments which are will also transform our town.

There are many stakeholders involved in this and all deserve a voice. The many community groups and organisations which enrich Folkestone and help to make it what is now and what it will be in the future offer invaluable perspectives. As the district council we have a leading role in managing the change taking place around us and believes its work will be supported through the establishment of a community forum, to bring the Council closer to stakeholders and them to each other, to seek common purpose and find ways in which all can work together to best effect.

Therefore, a Folkestone Community Forum was established in October 2023 by Cabinet Members to create a forum for members, officers and representatives of stakeholder groups to have meaningful engagement in an effective and efficient way.

The Leader, Cllr Holgate and I are the main Cabinet Members involved. It has been agreed that the forum will meet quarterly and be chaired by a community representative. Folkestone Town Council are also invited to take part.

There have been two meetings thus far and the main topics of discussion were the Levelling Up Fund project, Folca, parking, transport links, Grace Hill Library, the Licensing Forum and community safety. These topics for discussion were brought forward by the community groups as well as the Council.

I would be happy to send you a copy of the Terms of Reference for the group, and list of members, if that would be helpful.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Could we look at how we make sure there is a link between district councillors in Folkestone and the forum? I think there isn't district councillor representatives on the forum at the moment, only Cabinet Members. Could we also look at a way to share the minutes from the meetings with Members too?

**ANSWER:**

I don't think it's a problem to share the minutes The forum covers the whole of the district council area, which would be 12. We were conscious of not making it too council heavy. It is very much led by the community, who set the agenda in consultation with us. I'm happy to share that, and happy if any Councillors want to attend, although that is probably for the chair of the forum to agree.

**12. From Councillor Davison to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control**

Please could we have an update on the Leas pavilion development from the council's perspective?

**ANSWER:**

We understand that works have progressed on site with the construction of the below ground sprinkler tanks which is now around 60% complete. These works are being carried out with a limited workforce and are to be completed before progress can continue building upwards on the two wings of the project.

We have been informed that the developer is in the process of changing funders due to their existing funders modifying their terms and demands in response to the shifting economic climate. However they are confident that this re-negotiation of funds will conclude by the end of March, which will enable works to continue on site in April.

I share your concern about the reduction of activity on site so am encouraged to hear that the developer has extended his thanks to the council for its continued support and has confirmed that they are looking forward to completing the development.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Have you got any information about changes to road restrictions around the site, for example, as we know around the site at the moment, pavements are non-existent on some sides of the site? Is there any information around that in regard to the development, and changes there?

**ANSWER:**

I haven't got that information to hand, but I will find out and feed back.

***After the meeting, the following information was provided:***

***The closing of the footpaths is control and monitored by KCC Highways & Transportation. However, I would imagine the current closures approved by KCC would remain in place while the project continues.***

**13. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Scoffham , Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity**

The public can get information about discharges in the bay from things such as, for example, beachbouy and SSRS, but this only gives discharge information for the outlets at designated bathing areas, however, there are other outlets which are not considered at designated bathing areas such as for example, at Willop/Redoubt - which is used by a number of sea swimmers. As you will be aware It's understood discharges from any outlet affects the whole bay which is evidenced by Dymchurch not releasing all last season. But having high bacteria readings during test dates when other outlets were discharging. Can we please find out why is there no apparent transparency about these outlets and please can the council pressure Southern water and the EA make this data available on beachbouy etc? In so doing, I along with a number of others, would like to



have a look/tour at the New Romney plant and the Willop depot, to get a better understanding of how it all works - or should work! Can you please use your best endeavours to make this happen and also include other interested parties.

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Cooper

I share your concerns about poor bathing water quality which is quite unacceptable. Your support and constructive suggestions about better monitoring and site visits is something which I very much appreciate.

I have asked officers to contact Southern Water about the points you make and to ask for a response that could be shared with you. I would be equally interested to visit the New Romney and Willop facilities and will see if this can also be arranged.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can I also make a point, that among other things, that we need to involve more people? There are specialists aching to get involved and offer support. Lets be more responsive to what people are saying out there.

**14 From Councillor Keen to Councillor Prater, Deputy Leader and cabinet Member for Finance and Governance**

How many of our tenants are in receipt of housing benefits and how many are working and receiving housing benefit?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Keen.  
As of 26 February 2024 there are currently 1,496 Council tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. Of these households, 50 are registered as in employment or self-employed.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**15. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness**

What is the age breakdown of residents in age designated apartments in Warren Close?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Keen.

To make best use of housing stock council properties are designated as being for:

- General needs use. General needs properties such as houses or flats will usually be allocated to persons under 60 unless there are special circumstances.
- 'Age designated' properties, such as some bungalows, will normally be allocated to those aged 50 or over, or those under 50 with Band B medical assessment for mobility who require this type of accommodation. Although in areas of lower demand some properties designated for older people may be advertised without an age restriction.

This is very different to 'sheltered housing' or Independent Living for older people. When allocating Independent Living properties, although the same general principles as for other property types will apply, an assessment of an applicant's suitability and need for support must be completed before any tenancy is offered.

Independent Living schemes are managed differently, being subject to slightly different regulation with on-site Officers, whereas general needs stock will have a patch-based Neighbourhood Services Officer should they need to discuss any tenancy or neighbourhood matters. Although in order to be eligible for sheltered housing under the current Allocations policy, applicants must be over 50 years old or registered disabled, in reality applicants are more likely to be 60+ when allocated the property and the current age criteria for Independent Living is being reviewed.

Warren Close is currently referred to as 'age designated' properties, and is managed as part of the general needs socially rented stock.

Warren Close itself (34 properties)

- The youngest tenant is 46, the oldest tenant is 96. The average age is 64.

Neason Court (22 properties) – (which is also in Warren Close)

- The youngest tenant is 52, the oldest tenant is 88. The average age is 67.

I trust that this responds to the query.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

#### **16. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

Can the Leader confirm that flood prevention measures, including ditch inspections, that were not carried out in the periodical inspection programme in 2017, will now be actioned as a matter of urgency. The ditches in question

were in St Nicholas Road, New Romney and are the responsibility of the District Council.

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor. FHDC assist with the maintenance of St Nicholas Road drainage ditch under the Land & drainage Act 1991 using its permissive powers. As the properties in St Nicholas road have the ditch backing on to their gardens they have Riparian ownership, and the maintenance responsibility ultimately remains the responsibility of the property owners, not the District Council.

FHDC inspect ditches under its permissive powers granted by the Land & Drainage Act 1991 on an annual basis and carry out strimming on a yearly basis where ditches are accessible and as required clear silt from ditches.

In April 2017 EPS Design carried out a full survey of all drainage ditches and produced a report of obstructions. No inspection was possible of stretch G from properties 64 – 88 St Nicholas as there was no direct means of access to the ditch for maintenance purposes and it appears that some of the gardens of surrounding properties have extended and built over the ditch, it could not be confirmed if these sections have been culverted. Following the reports in 2017 a number of obstructions were cleared by FHDC to all ditches.

The challenge with the St Nicholas Road ditch is that access is very restricted for the majority of its length as it is contained within private residents gardens. FHDC have inspected St Nicholas Road where possible, we have responded to resident reports of possible obstructions and have written to property owners when advised of challenges. What we cannot do is inspect ditches which are entirely within a property owner's garden on a yearly basis or if they are culverted. If there is an obstruction we have to rely on reports from property owners.

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*Following the response being given, the time limit for Councillor questions expired. However, the supplementary question had already been submitted and is therefore answered below:*

**Supplementary question:**

Two residents from St Nicholas road were displaced by the flooding in November 2023 and are still awaiting completion of repairs to their property. In this time, they have still continued to pay Council Tax. Would the Leader support the reimbursement of Council Tax to these two residents, as they have received no additional financial support from any agency. FHDC Officers have confirmed they can apply to the Valuation Office to have their properties exempt but this would not result in reimbursement of any previously paid Council Tax.

**ANSWER:**

Again, Thank you for your question Councillor Thomas.

I fully sympathise with these two residents, however the district council does not have a scheme in place to support or give exemptions or refunds. As you mention in your question, if a resident considers that a property is uninhabitable, they can make a request to the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) to have it removed from Council Tax listings. If they agree that it should be removed, they will inform the Council and we would be able to remove it from the date we are given by them. This would remove the charge from the given date. In my written answer, I will provide the contact details for the Valuation Office:

For information, their contact details can be found using the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/valuation-office-agency>

<https://www.gov.uk/challenge-council-tax-band>

If these residents are in financial hardship they can contact the welfare team who will review their income and expenditure to consider if the Council Tax is not affordable

## Appendix 1 – additional information in respect of Question 8

**Pumping Stations – No of Properties Served**

<b>Site</b>	<b>No of Users</b>	<b>FHDC Tenants</b>	<b>Freeholders</b>
Kings Street	14	7	7
Moore Close	27	8	19
Ranmore	4	1	3
Ivychurch Road	4	2	2
Elmsfield	16	3	13
Rectory Road	18	5	13
Patchway	8	5	3
Rectory Close	4	4	0
Churchview & Clarklands	24	9	15
Stelling Minnis	19	9	10
Court-at-street	7	7	0
The Limes/St Catherine's	12	9	3

**Treatment works (or pump & treatment systems)**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Connected properties</b>	<b>FHDC Tenants</b>	<b>Fhold</b>
<b>Hammell Cottages</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Moore Close, Ranmoore, &amp; King Street</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Elmsfield &amp; The Limes &amp; St Cathrines</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>

A further 7 properties are serviced which are stand alone tenanted.

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## **Council – 28 February 2024**

### **Councillor Questions:**

#### **9. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

It has been brought to my attention the Dymchurch Dippers Sea Swimming Group have had to advise their members it was not advisable to go into the sea due to continued discharge of sewage water across the Bay. Could you please advise on the actions the council is taking on:

1. Putting pressure on Southern Water to upgrade the sewage plants on the Marsh and to stop them polluting our beaches.
2. Querying why is Hythe being upgraded and not the Romney Marsh.
3. Notifying people and others to ensure the residents of and visitors to the Romney Marsh are updated about the beaches and sea water standards.

and finally, would you please call a public meeting and invite the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Local Parish Councils and concerned local stakeholders to come along in order to work together to try to resolve these and similar matters?

#### **13. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Scoffham , Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity**

The public can get information about discharges in the bay from things such as, for example, beachbouy and SSRS, but this only gives discharge information for the outlets at designated bathing areas, however, there are other outlets which are not considered at designated bathing areas such as for example, at Willop/Redoubt - which is used by a number of sea swimmers. As you will be aware It's understood discharges from any outlet affects the whole bay which is evidenced by Dymchurch not releasing all last season. But having high bacteria readings during test dates when other outlets were discharging. Can we please find out why is there no apparent transparency about these outlets and please can the council pressure Southern water and the EA make this data available on beachbouy etc? In so doing, I along with a number of others, would like to have a look/tour at the New Romney plant and the Willop depot, to get a better understanding of how it all works - or should work! Can you please use your best endeavours to make this happen and also include other interested parties.

**Following the council meeting Southern Water and the Environment Agency were contacted in relation to Q9 (points 1&2) and Q13 for comment.**

Tom Gallagher, Open Water Improvement Lead responded on behalf of Southern Water.

Peter Ehmann has responded on behalf of the Environment Agency.

## **Q9**

### **1. Putting pressure on Southern Water to upgrade the sewage plants on the Marsh and to stop them polluting our beaches.**

**EA** - This question is for SWS to answer.

**SWS** - We are working hard to reduce storm overflow activity throughout the region. This includes the West Hythe and Range Road Catchment areas. The company is investing £3 billion between 2020 and 2025 to improve our environmental and operational performance, focusing on significantly reducing the number of pollutions caused by technical failures on our assets and blockages in the network. We've already deployed over 26,000 sewer sensors to detect and reduce sewer blockages before they become an issue. This is helping us to make steps in the right direction, demonstrated by our move from a one to two-star Environmental Performance Assessment rating by the Environment Agency for 2022. We know we need to go further than this though, which is why we're expecting to achieve three stars by 2025 and are working extremely hard to make this happen.

The company have spent £10 billion since privatisation to increase the volume of wastewater that is fully treated before being release back into the environment (previously only approximately 50% treated to around 95% today). This has helped improve the quality of our bathing waters from only 28% meeting public health standards pre-privatisation, to 88% now rated as 'good' or 'excellent' by the Environment Agency.

While we work on improving our assets, reducing storm overflows requires an entirely different approach. During heavy or prolonged rain, local sewer networks can struggle to cope with the amount of water entering pipes and storage tanks. When they fill up, pressure relief valves built into the network – known as storm overflows – activate to release the excess water into rivers and seas to prevent homes, roads, and businesses from flooding.

In our Bathing Season Report 2023, we included a chart showing the impact of rainfall and groundwater on storm overflow releases during the summer months. We saw unprecedented rainfall in 2023. In March we had more than two and a half times the normal amount of rainfall. In October, we had more than three times the normal amount of rainfall - by the end of October we'd had more rain than we normally get in a year. We ended the year at around 40% more rainfall than normal. Groundwater also plays a part. We had 150% more rainfall than normal between November 2022 and January 2023, starting the year with



exceptionally high groundwater levels (the highest ever recorded at one of the sites in our region). This has added further complications to an already complex issue.

This is an industry leading approach to find long-term solutions and is backed with £35m investment (agreed with Ofwat and money put in by our shareholders). As well as improving our assets and storage capacity, the team are piloting several schemes including: optimising existing assets (both publicly and privately owned), finding and fixing misconnections in the community where rainwater is entering the wastewater network, installing nature-based solutions such as wetlands, raingardens, trees and greening our high streets to separate surface water/divert water back to the environment, and trialling rain harvesting devices to slow the flow of water in towns and cities.

Some key highlights so far:

- 93 schools provided with sustainable drainage systems to manage impermeable area like playgrounds and large roofs. Removing well over 20 football pitches worth of hard surface run off each time it rains
- Over 3000+ slow-drain water butts installed to manage surface water. In one village on the Isle of Wight, the installation of water butts reduced released from the local pumping station by 70%
- Reconfigured the storage capacity at Swalecliffe Wastewater Treatment Works, in agreement with the Environment Agency. The changes have reduced storm releases on site by c. 30%.
- Over 250 raingarden planters installed in the community to manage surface water.
- 200 pipe joints and 1.2km of private pipework sealed to prevent groundwater infiltration. In the Pan Parishes Pathfinder, this has reduced tankers sent to site from an average of 30 per year before over pumping was required, to only 5 currently despite record groundwater levels.
- 1 wetland constructed at Lavant to naturally treat stormwater.
- Deployed two water quality buoys to test the water every 15 minutes. This is a pilot project with one buoy off Hayling Island. We hope to share the results later this year. We also have five citizen science projects across the south which are ongoing, one on the Isle of Wight.
- 142 private misconnections to the surface water sewer identified.
- Over 40 site tours to provide an understanding of the wastewater treatment process and answer customer questions.
- 34 highway SuDS schemes being investigated to manage surface water from roads.

We have almost 1,000 storm overflows in our region and 50% of these are already hitting the government's new 2050 target, for example spilling 10 times or less a year. Our plan sets out how we will tackle the remaining storm overflows that need attention in our region.

We are prioritising overflows in line with Government and regulatory targets to first reduce the impact on shellfish waters, environmentally sensitive sites and bathing waters. While we are also trying to include high frequently release sites.

**2. Querying why is Hythe being upgraded and not the Romney Marsh.**

**EA** - This question is for SWS to answer.

**SWS** – *Did not respond directly on this point.*

**Q13 Can we please find out why is there no apparent transparency about these outlets and please can the council pressure Southern water and the EA make this data available on beachbuoy etc?**

**EA** - Beachbouy shows data of all storm overflows, which could impact on designated bathing waters. The Beachbuoy service is operated by SWS and we are not responsible for its content. We understand that the purpose of beachbuoy is to notify people when storm discharges (of untreated sewage and storm water caused by heavy rainfall) are made.

For clarity, the EA do not receive any additional data or information on the operation of Storm overflows, to what is shown on Beachbuoy. Southern Water are only obliged to notify us if a discharge is or has been made, which is not compliant with its permit. If such an event occurs, we would be in contact with Folkstone and Hythe District Council to discuss whether additional actions need to be taken such as issuing advice against bathing.

There are other discharges made into the sea apart from Storm Overflows also known as Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs).

Rainwater drains (surface water sewers) will discharge rain run-off from roads and houses into watercourses including the sea during wet weather. This water may be contaminated with substances that gets picked up off roads etc. Regular maintenance of road gully pots is therefore vital to reduce the risk of contaminants going into the sea. Houses that have misconnections (sinks/toilets plumbed in to the rainwater drain rather than the foul sewer by dodgy builders) can also find its way in to the sea via surface water sewers. Beachbouy does not notify people of discharges from surface water sewers. These outfalls are likely to discharge whenever there is rainfall and are often not owned by Southern Water.

Sewage treatment works treat foul sewage and discharge treated effluent into the environment. This is a continuous discharge and the treatment is designed to a level, which protects against impact on bathing waters. At New Romney and Dymchurch Sewage treatment works, (Waste water treatment works) the effluent has additional UV treatment to kill bacteria. Dymchurch works differs slightly from New Romney works in that it is designed to treat all flows that arrive and so doesn't have a CSO or storm overflow. Therefore, the discharge from Dymchurch

works should always be treated. This is why there is no storm overflow shown on Beachbouy website.

The continuous discharge from both New Romney and Dymchurch works is monitored and tested (by Southern Water). The results are reported to us and are available on the GOV.uk website. [Open WIMS data](#)

Individual bathing water results can also be seen on our SWIMFO website. [Bathing water quality \(data.gov.uk\)](#)

**SWS** – Beachbuoy does indeed feature storm overflows and outfalls that affect designed bathing waters. However, we asked a group of independent experts to conduct an assessment of Beachbuoy’s ability to provide consistent, reliable and credible near real-time warnings of potential water quality impacts from storm overflow releases, and to provide a series of recommendations to improve the accuracy and user trustworthiness and confidence of the system.

We’re committed to acting on the recommendations and will incorporate them as both short and long-term goals for Beachbuoy – details on timeframes are outlined in report.

We’re committed to acting on many of the recommendations as part of our new and improved Beachbuoy platform, which we’re looking forward to launching in spring 2024, complete with all inland outfalls and improved usability in features. You can see the report below

[sw-bb-review-final-report\\_v7.pdf \(southernwater.co.uk\)](#)

**Q13 In so doing, I along with a number of others, would like to have a look/tour at the New Romney plant and the Willop depot, to get a better understanding of how it all works - or should work! Can you please use your best endeavours to make this happen and also include other interested parties?**

**EA** - For SWS to answer about site visits. For clarification, the EA Willop depot is an operational depot for Flood risk management staff to work out of and is situated next to the Willop surface water pumping station. The purpose of this pumping station is to manage flood risk and maintain levels in the ditch system of the local area. The treated effluent from Dymchurch works discharges in to the basin next to the Willop depot where it mixes with other surface water flows and is discharged through the sea wall in to the sea. It is not connected in any way to the Dymchurch sewage treatment works and operates entirely separately. As previously mentioned, there are no storm sewage overflows in this catchment and therefore only treated effluent is being discharged at this location.

If Members really want to visit the Willop Depot I will contact my colleagues in Flood risk management. However, there is nothing in the depot itself, which is anything to do with sewage or sewage treatment and the pumping station is not really visible. The basin can be viewed from the roadside.

**SWS** – *Did not respond directly on this point.*

## Council – 28 February 2025

### Recommendations from Cabinet held on 28 February 2024

#### **Agenda item 13 (Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy, Capital Programme, Reserves and Balances, Treasury and Investment Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax for 2024/25)**

An amendment to paper C/23/90 has been proposed, this relates to the Annual Member Allowances increment within the 2024/25 budget. The draft published budget proposal identified £36.8k (6.7%) increase to the 2024/25 Annual Member Allowances. This is in line with the Council Constitution that the allowances shall be automatically adjusted, annually, by reference to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The member allowances increase was based on the September CPI index, for implementation the following April.

This proposed budget would now need to be amended to reflect the following changes.

1. A reduction from 6.7% to 5% on basic allowance payable to all members; and
2. Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for 2024/25 are frozen at 2023/24 payment levels.

This would save around £13,200 a year and would have the added benefit of reducing the total bill for allowances, saving the Council more money in the longer term.

The changes to the published budget will have small cascading impacts on the figures presented in the original agenda pack. The changes are summarised below:

- The 2024/25 Members Allowance budget will be reduced, with the net revenue budget requirement shown in 'Appendix A' reducing from £18,995,555 to £18,982,355, a movement of £13,200.
- The Net Transfers to/(from) Earmarked Reserves/drawdown from reserves detailed in Appendix 6 will be reduced from £405,000 to £392,000, a movement of £13,200.
- Paragraph 2.5 will now read.....*The 2024/25 net service expenditure is £18,982,355. The budget details are set out at Appendix 1.*

For ease of reference, the updated Appendix 1 – Revenue Budget 2024/25 is provided below:

#### **Appendix 1 – Revenue Budget 2024/25**

<b>GENERAL FUND SUMMARY</b>				
<b>2023/24</b>		<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	
<b>Original Budget</b>		<b>Draft Original Budget</b>	<b>Draft Original Budget</b>	
		<b>Jan-24</b>	<b>Feb-24</b>	
£		£	£	
	<b>SUMMARY OF NET EXPENDITURE</b>			
	<b>Service Heads</b>			
8,445,560	Finance, Strategy & Corporate Services	7,751,330	7,834,430	
683,190	Human Resources	733,260	733,260	
2,976,100	Governance & Law	3,248,940	3,230,640	
740,960	Leadership Support	590,900	511,660	
6,712,940	Place	6,957,130	7,022,130	
413,180	Economic Development	435,800	435,800	
165,400	Planning	206,080	208,480	
2,483,630	Operations	2,301,180	2,283,680	
3,048,610	Housing	2,971,090	3,081,790	
(5,919,556)	Recharges	(6,440,395)	(6,475,515)	
33,040	Vacancy Turnover Target Savings	(424,000)	116,000	
<b>19,783,054</b>	<b>TOTAL HEAD OF SERVICE NET EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>18,331,315</b>	<b>18,982,355</b>	
541,430	Internal Drainage Board Levies	585,610	585,610	
2,502,000	Interest Payable and Similar Charges	2,381,000	2,381,000	
(2,521,000)	Interest and Investment Income	(3,043,000)	(3,043,000)	
(365,568)	New Homes Bonus Grant	(135,700)	(135,700)	
(4,616,551)	Other non-service related Government Grants	(5,584,550)	(5,758,680)	
2,801,300	Town and Parish Council Precepts	2,801,300	2,993,850	
<b>18,124,665</b>	<b>TOTAL GENERAL FUND OPERATING NET EXP</b>	<b>15,335,975</b>	<b>16,005,435</b>	
(2,180,000)	Net Transfers to/(from) Earmarked Reserves	57,720	(392,090)	
1,625,000	Minimum Revenue Provision	2,325,000	2,325,000	
2,487,000	Capital Expenditure funded from Revenue	1,055,000	1,055,000	
<b>20,056,665</b>	<b>TOTAL TO BE MET FROM LOCAL TAXPAYERS</b>	<b>18,773,695</b>	<b>18,993,345</b>	
(59,451)	Transfer to/(from) the Collection Fund	-	-	
(3,921,454)	Business Rates Income	(4,023,175)	(4,023,175)	
16,075,760	<b>TOTAL TO BE MET FROM DEMAND ON THE COLLECTION FUND &amp; GENERAL RESERVE</b>	<b>14,750,520</b>	<b>14,970,170</b>	
(14,289,513)	Council Tax-Demand on Collection Fund	(14,750,520)	(14,970,170)	
<b>1,786,247</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	
	<b>(SURPLUS)/DEFICIT FOR YEAR</b>			
1,786,247	Contribution from General Reserve	-	-	
1,786,247	<b>BALANCE AT END OF YEAR</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	