

## **Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Councils' Joint Committee**

Held at:	Remote Meeting
Date	Thursday, 19 January 2023
Present	Councillors Graham Allison, Roger Joyce, Terence Mullard and Paul Thomas
Apologies for Absence	Councillors Laszlo Dudas and Martin Sweeney
Officers Present:	James Clapson (Case Officer (Committee)), Charlotte Spendley (Director of Corporate Services) and Adrian Tofts (Strategy, Policy & Performance Lead Specialist)

### **1. Appointment of chairman**

Town Councillor Paul Thomas was appointed Chairman for the meeting.

### **2. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 were submitted and agreed as a correct record.

### **4. Changes to National Planning Policy and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill**

Mr Tofts provided the Committee with an update on the recent changes to National Planning Policy, and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. The presentation slides have been attached to the minutes for reference.

During the presentation, it was noted that:

- Consultation was currently underway on the 'Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy'. The consultation period ran until 2 March and interested parish and town councils could

access the consultation documents through the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>

- Only 40% of local authorities had an up-to-date (5 years old or less) local plan in place. There were proposals to simplify and speed up the local plan process. Reforms were targeted for implementation towards the end of 2024.
- Folkestone & Hythe District Council had an up-to-date local plan that was adopted in 2020, so under the new proposals, it would not need to demonstrate a five-year housing supply; however, the housing delivery test remained in place, therefore the system would remain fundamentally unchanged.
- There were no proposed changes to the method for calculating housing numbers, however national housing figures were to become an 'advisory starting point for establishing a housing requirement'. It was unclear exactly this phrase would mean in practice.
- The Government still had a target to build 300,000 new homes a year across the country by the mid-2020s.
- Previously raised questions such as how to speed up development on sites, or how to consider applications from applicants who have a history of breaching planning conditions, remained unanswered.
- There would be further consultation to come on the National Planning Policy Framework, and consultation on a new Infrastructure Levy.
- Cabinet would consider the Council's response to the consultation when it met on 22 February.

During consideration of the item, the following points were noted:

- There had been a lot of campaigning for more localism in the Levelling Up Bill, however this seems to have had little impact so far.
- The Government indicated that the local plan should be renewed every five years.
- It was becoming harder for the Council to demonstrate a secure housing supply, as the required number of houses to be delivered had increased significantly.
- Some windfall sites were included in the supply calculation, based on previous rates of delivery.
- Parish and Town Councils could contribute to consultation response from the Kent Association of Local Councils' Planning Advisory Committee.

## 5. **Budget Strategy and Draft General Fund Budget 2023/24**

Mrs Spendley updated the Committee about the Council's Draft General Fund Budget for 2023/24 and the Budget Strategy.

During the update the following points were noted:

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy was reviewed each year. It was adopted by Full Council in November and showed a significant budget deficit over the medium term.

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- The draft General Fund Budget 2023/24 initially had a shortfall of £4.286million, the Council's strategy to reduce this gap had the following strands:
  - A review of the Council's Fees and Charges
  - A curtailment of all non-essential spending.
  - To refocus the priorities of the Council, such as re-phasing work in recognition of the current financial and capacity challenges faced by the Council.
  - A wholistic review of services to identify any possible efficiencies.
  - To continue with strategic investments, such as the Otterpool Park project.
  - To undertake a review of the Council's reserves.
  - To maximise opportunities such as remaining in initiatives like the business rates pool; and to continue to apply for funding for enhancements such as the levelling up fund.
- The 2022/23 quarter three budget monitoring position showed that £570,000 of savings had been made without impact on the provision of front-line services.
- The provisional local government settlement was announced in December and offered the Council around £1.7million of funding. Additionally, the Council could increase Council Tax by up to 2.99% without triggering a referendum, this limit had increased from 1.99%.
- The draft Budget that would be considered by Cabinet on 26 January 2023, now showed a budget deficit of just over £2million. Full Council would meet on 23 February 2023 to agree the budget and council tax rates for the 2023/24 year.
- It was likely that the Council would need to use its reserve funds to help close some of the remaining budget gap.
- The budget consultation period started in December and would run until the start of February, people could participate using the following link: [Budget consultation 2023-2024 - Folkestone & Hythe District Council \(folkestone-hythe.gov.uk\)](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/budget-consultation-2023-2024)
- Members offered their thanks for the budget report, noting that it was straight forward and easy to understand.