

FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 20 September 2023

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Mike Blakemore, James Butcher and Liz McShane

38. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

39. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2023 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chair.

40. Chair's Communications

The Chair gave her communications as follows:

“I started the summer with the Folkestone Pride parade, walking through the town at the very front of the parade I was encouraged and uplifted by the many people who stopped to cheer and wave as we progressed from the Town Hall to the Leas. I have spent the earlier part of the day at New Romney Fair and both events highlighted what a vibrant and engaging District we live in.

On Saturday 12th August I had a shock to the system when I woke up very early indeed to start the Folkestone Park on the 9th anniversary. What an amazing treasure we have in the Leas and the view onto the zig zag path, coastal park, pebble beach and the sparkling sea beyond. I can think nothing better to look and encourage me whilst slogging away running a race. Perhaps soon that might entice me to join in.

I attended one of the best events of the year – the Folkestone air show. I have never seen so many people on the Leas, for a couple of hours I lost sight of the pavement and could only see endless streams of people. Thank you to all the organisers and the council for putting our district on the map with such a marvellous event.

My visit to the NCI station up on East cliff made me proud of the men of women who volunteer to watch out for people and ships in distress.

I am indebted to the mayor of Hawkinge for inviting me to two hidden gems Terlingham Vineyard and The battle of Britain Museum in aid of his charities. The view from the vineyard is the most stunning I've seen in a long while and the museum is so special because it has personal stories of the men that fought and died to preserve our freedom.

I look forward to finding more hidden gems to share with you”.

41. **Petitions**

There were no petitions.

42. **Questions from the Public**

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

43. **Questions from Councillors**

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

44. **Announcements of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader made the following announcements:

“I have attended many meetings regarding Otterpool Park with government agencies, developers and potential Joint Venture Partners, these discussions continue.

Princes Parade hoarding: We have now received the report from the contaminated land specialists, and we are able to move forward. Unsurprisingly there are low levels of contamination across the site. It will be necessary to fence the land. The hoardings can now come down but we have to immediately fence the land with a suitable fence, we are currently seeking permission from Historic England regarding the fence posts and quotes are being sought for the work - so while progress has been slow, we have been progressing! Once the site is refenced we will be consulting to ask local people for their views on the future of Prince's Parade

Napier Barracks update from Home Office. We understand that the Home Office is considering the inclusion of Napier Barracks as part of contingency plans to house asylum seekers. If this proposal goes ahead it could potentially double the numbers housed on at the barracks and would likely need temporary facilities such as tents to brought onto the site. This is a hugely worrying proposal as in our view there is already a lack of space at Napier and conditions are overcrowded. Clearly this is not something that we would wish to see

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happen. At present there has been no formal announcement from the Home Office and we will have to wait and see what they decide. If the Home Office press forward with their idea of increasing the number of asylum seekers at Napier Barracks, I will be writing formally to voice the Council's objections and I ask both Councillor McConville and Councillor Hollingsbee to join me in voicing our objections.

I was delighted to visit Home Pine House to give a Community Champion Award to Mr. Jim Marsh, who, along with his wife have kept the gardens at Home Pine House to such an excellent standard. Jim also raises a great deal of money for Great Ormond St Hospital, organises the community bingo and plays a major role in many other community projects. I was pleased to offer him the grateful thanks of the Council and to highlight his role in our community.

Following their announcement of cuts to local bus services I convened a meeting with Stagecoach to discuss. I can report a positive response, with some routes being saved. The Stagecoach Managing Director will be considering my views on how we might save further routes. There have been meetings, email and some difficult discussions with Stagecoach but I can report, this evening, that I am very hopeful that the No.10 bus service will be reinstated to Lympne.

I was please to attend the Royal British Legion - Freedom of the Town Celebration Gala Evening and to specifically honour Mrs Ann Berry an ex Councillor who does a great deal of work for the RBL.

I have attended the Kent Leaders Forum to discuss the issues which affect the Council's in Kent. I have been in close contact with regard to the Kent Resilience team, in their management of both Dover TAP and Operation Brock and I can report that we managed to most of the summer without too many major incidents.

I attended a meeting of Go Folkestone and was delighted to hear their plans for street collection of small electrical appliances for recycling, which will be rolled out in a couple of weeks time.

I attended Brockhill School to talk to year 12 and year 13 students about Local Government and as always, came away really impressed with the school.

I attended a meeting of Cycle Shepway and will be supporting their Big Ride Out on 21st September from Folkestone West Station at 4.00pm.

With regard to the news reports of RAAC in many schools nationally I can report that only Palmash Primary School was affected. The remedial works were carried out during the summer and we are in contact with our KCC colleagues monitoring any further works to buildings.

I have held a number of meetings with officers, KCC officers and the Leader of KCC, Roger Gough regarding Grace Hill Library. I have also had meetings with Damian Collins MP who has raised the matter with Michael Gove, the Minister for Levelling Up. While there is no certainty, officers are looking at the possibility of extending our Levelling Up works to include essential repairs to the Library Building. Please note, this has yet to be agreed and any additional funding is unlikely to provide for a comprehensive restoration of the building, but it may allow for essential repairs and for the building to be made wind and weathertight”.

Councillor McConville, Leader of the Labour Group responded to the communications and stated that in terms of Napier Barracks, his group had made it clear over a long period of time they had called for closure of the barracks, as they were not fit for purpose, and the same could be said for the government policy on this matter. He added that he was happy to voice his objections to this proposal if and when needed. In terms of the buses, he stated that since the timetable changes on 3 September, major routes had already had at least one, sometimes two timetable changes. There was an unacceptable level of daily cancellations and without X (formerly known as Twitter) people would not know of the cancellations. Sadly, a number of drivers had taken redundancy in the recent restructure and bus station changes, and those staff who remained now seemed to be leaving, meaning there seemed to be no end to this substandard of service.

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, also responded to the communications and stated that she was looking forward to seeing the reports relating to Otterpool Park. She raised concerns about the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which stated that the original funding proposal was not now considered affordable. In terms of the Princes Parade hoardings, she stated she would be interested to know the costings of taking down the existing hoardings and replacing them with fencing. She added that there was an asset of £20 million sitting there, and something needed to be done about it. In terms of Napier Barracks, she completely agreed, and in her time as Cabinet Member, she stated that she had spent hours in meetings on the matter. It was not just the number and the expansion, but the resources that were required in order to manage the facility – ie community safety, litter, and the pressure on doctors surgeries, dentists, hospitals. She asked the Leader why he would wait for the decision to be made, rather than submitting the objections now. She added that it was good news in respect of bus services, particularly the Number 10 bus to Lympe, and that she had been approached by a number of people about this who would be delighted. Anything that could be done to help was important. She stated that it was lovely to hear of the Freedom of the Town gala evening and offered congratulations to former Cllr Mrs Ann Berry who she stated had spent a long time in the council chamber and had done an awful lot of work, and asked for her thanks to be recorded. She thanked the Leader for his comprehensive report.

The Leader then responded to the comments of both opposition group leaders and added that he would take on board all comments made and would try to respond in detail with figures. He suggested a discussion about Napier Barracks in order to compose a joint objection. He concluded by advising that on Saturday at 11.30am, the Folkestone Great Beach Clean would be taking place at the beach at the bottom of Remembrance Road. He stated that everyone was welcome, equipment would be supplied and it would be a great event. He added that on Sunday, the Folkestone Half Marathon would be taking place, running from the Leas, into Hythe, and back again. He stated that if people did go and spectate, and saw a grey haired individual staggering along at the end, it was likely to be him.

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

RESOLVED:

That the Leaders announcements be noted.

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

45. **Portfolio Holder reports to Council**

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

46. **Opposition Business**

Councillor Cooper, on behalf of the Labour Group, set out the opposition business which raised concerns about the system for reporting information on bathing water in the district.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper,
Seconded by Councillor Chapman; and

RESOLVED:

That Option (b) (refer the issue to the Cabinet or relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as the case may be, for their observations, before deciding whether to make a decision on the issue) be applied to the business shown below:

To make it known to full council what, if any, system is currently in place across the District to provide information about bathing water – including pollution incidents, both on the councils digital platforms and in an easily accessible place in the near vicinity of the bathing water.

If no system is currently in place, then to refer to cabinet to approve a system which delivers these outcomes.

This system should consider but not be limited to: Digital displays in the vicinity of bathing sites which access real time data from Southern Water's Beachbouy software. A system of flags which is clearly identifiable.

Before implementing this proposal, funding would need to be agreed and secured for this initiative.

To refer this to cabinet to determine a report looking at options to deliver this outcome. Either through:

- Solely council funded
- In partnership with Southern Water, the Environment Agency or a collaboration of all parties.

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

47. **Motions on Notice**

Councillor McConville outlined his motion which related to toilet twinning.

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Davison; and

RESOLVED:

- To twin the 3 new changing places toilets with the charity "Toilet Twinning".
- To pay £180, £60 per toilet, to achieve this.
- To display the certificates received within the changing places toilets once opened.

(Voting figures: 21 for, 6 against, 0 abstentions).

48. **Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)**

The report set out the Council's policy on the use of directed surveillance and covert human intelligence sources under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Proposed by Councillor Fuller,
Seconded by Councillor Holgate; and

RESOLVED:

1. That report A/23/14 be received and noted.
2. That the RIPA policy and procedure in appendix 1 to the report be approved.

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

49. **Members' Allowances - Independent Remuneration Panel**

The report recommended that the term of the current three Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) be extended a further four years to November 2023, and also that recruitment be commenced to fill the vacant fourth IRP position.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That report A/23/13 be received and noted.
2. That the term of the existing IRP Members (Paul Murphy, Judy Williams and Chris Harman) be extended for a further four year term of office from the 2 December 2023.
3. That the term of the Parish Remuneration Panel be extended under the regulations, the members of which shall be identical to the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel.
4. That delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive to commence recruitment for a fourth member of the IRP (to fill the vacancy left by Beverley Crouch's resignation in March 2022) and to form a selection panel comprised of the Chair of the Council, the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader of the Council and a representative from the Conservative Group.

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

50. **Transformation - 2023-25**

The report set out an approach to transformation spanning a two-year period. The transformation seeks to reduce management duplication, improve efficiency, ensure that organisation capacity is focused on the Council's priorities, and deliver financial savings by making the best use of IT, Premises, Asset & Contract Management and reducing the overall number of staff across the Council.

Proposed by Councillor Meade,
Seconded by Councillor Keen,

That the consideration of the report be deferred and a detailed plan be provided before the vote took place.

(Voting figures: 9 for, 16 against, 1 against).

The amendment was therefore LOST.

Members commented on various aspects of the report and the Chief Executive provided clarity on some of the points raised.

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

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/23/15 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the creation of a £1.5 million transformation fund in the budget for 2023/24 be approved, drawn from existing reserves.**

(Voting figures: 18 for, 9 against, 0 abstentions).