

**Council – 24 January 2024**

**Councillor Questions:**

**1. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations**

The paper C/23/68 presented at the December Cabinet meeting, proposed changes to the number of litter bins serviced by Veolia, as part of the street cleaning contract. I fully support the need for the Council to achieve savings to address the gap in the budget that currently exists. The proposal shows that savings can be achieved by cutting the number of bins across the District from 1060 to 775 (a reduction of 285 bins). What criteria is going to be used to ascertain which bins will be removed and do Veolia have accurate data to support the removal of the least used bins?

**Supplementary Question.**

Please can the Cabinet Member confirm that all Town and Parish Councils will be consulted on which bins are to be removed from their Wards, prior to the bins being removed. Can the Cabinet Member also confirm that organisations, such as Litter Picking Watch Romney Marsh (who do such a fantastic job keeping the District litter free) will be allowed to support the Town/Parish Councils and have an input into the final bin locations.

**2. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations**

Would the cabinet Member agree with me that the work of the Area Officers has been transformational in ensuring that incidents of graffiti, especially obscene and racist graffiti have been removed promptly and that their support has been crucial in supporting volunteer groups across the district in litter picking securing many hundreds of hours of volunteering and would he assure me and the council that this team will not be a casualty in the forthcoming budget proposals?

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

In light of the council's current budget constraints, which have led to the unfortunate necessity of laying off staff and possibly making substantial service cuts, I'm left wondering about the wisdom behind a particular decision. Specifically, is it a judicious use of taxpayers' money to dismantle a perfectly functional fence that once encircled a site you and your party deemed 'so hazardous it was a matter of life and death', only to replace it with a smaller one? Rather than allocating a budget ranging from a quarter to half a million pounds for this endeavour, I believe it would be more fiscally responsible to explore a more economical approach. I recall suggesting prior to the election that we consider a district-wide referendum. This approach would allow for a more democratic and

informed decision-making process that takes into account the concerns and preferences of our constituents.

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

To avoid any speculation and to allow the whole district residents who actually pay council tax to have a say, could a district wide referendum be held over the proposed swimming pool as to where it should be eventually positioned as it appears that a minority councils decisions will impact the whole district?

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

As you vigorously fought against the development of a Leisure Centre including up to 150 units at Princes Parade (East) on part brownfield and a landfill site, will you be taking the same stance against the loss of the golf course and its redevelopment into a lakeside holiday destination at Princes Parade (West)?

**6. From Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee to Councillor Fuller, Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Accountability**

I was very disappointed to see the Customer Service Excellence signs removed in the Civic Centre and on the website. In 2022 the assessor from the Centre for Assessment visited the District to carry out a comprehensive assessment and the Council was again awarded the Certificate of Customer Service Excellence. We were also successful in being awarded Compliance Plus in 16 categories. This was something the staff could rightly be extremely proud of and residents recognised. Can the Cabinet Member tell us how much money has been saved by not renewing the customer Excellence programme?

**7. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations**

Could you please explain why the process of fixing some of the district owned streetlights within the Romney Marsh Ward, seem to take forever to either switch on, fix and/or upgrade before being transferred to Kent County Council for adoption. In so doing, would you please give an update on the progress of the work to date within the Romney Marsh Ward on said streetlights as per Report number: C/21/44 before the Cabinet in November 2021 including, how many district owned streetlights are there within my Ward, and how many of those have been upgraded. How many of them are waiting to be switched on, and how many have been adopted by Kent County Council. In addition to, what is the number of district owned streetlights within the Romney Marsh Ward awaiting adoption. More importantly, by what date, can the residents of the Romney Marsh Ward expect said streetlights to be either switched on, upgraded, and adopted as the case maybe.

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

Yet again the District is sadly coming in for unnecessary criticism due to the classification of the quality of the Bathing Water around St Marys Bay and now Littlestone. I am advised the problems are being caused by a combination of agricultural waste washing off of the Marsh and leakage from domestic waste services from individual properties. The Environment Agency have determined this from the tests they have done. I understand they are now working on locating the sources of the problem, and when they have done this they will seek to take action against the property and land owners where the problems are occurring.

Will this council please write to Philip Duffy and Sarah Chare the Chief Executive and Executive Director of Local Operations of the Environment Agency to ask why is it taking so long to remedy this problem and when can residents and visitors expect it to be fixed? Could a copy of that letter also be sent to the Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pointing out the apparent inertness of the EA is causing a lot of untold concern regarding the existing and future quality testing of the sea water?

9. **From Councillor Meade to Councillor M Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

It is quite some time since this council voted to create a Youth Council to allow the youngsters of the District to input into decisions that will affect their future. Can you please give an update as to when this may start?

10. **From Councillor Meade to Councillor M Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

The Council released a press release regarding Grace Hill library this month, but it had little to no information and detail regarding the Grade 2 listed building. Can you please confirm whether the building will be reinstated as a library, arts and community hub or have the people of Folkestone lost a building that was built and bequeathed to them as a library?

11. **From Councillor Meade to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations**

As a KCC councillor I have been very keen to organise proper accessibility for wheelchair and mobility scooter users onto Sunny Sands Beach. At present, although there is a concrete ramp down to the sand, the sand is so fine it makes it nearly impossible for residents and visitors to move through the sand to the seashore in wheelchairs or scooters. I have set aside £10k from my community grant to work in conjunction with District council, who control Sunny Sands, to make this possible - whether with a mobi mat (which I'm being told is not possible due to the tides) or a wooden / plastic boardwalk. I know the leader is positive about this project, but I am being told that there is

no officer resource to do the necessary Safety checks etc. to take this vital piece of equipment forward. This would make a huge difference to our mobility impaired and visual impaired residents, visitors and their families and allow them to enjoy our beach fully with their families, which is only right. Can the Cabinet Member please confirm that officer resource will be found to work with me to make this happen if at all possible?

**12. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness**

What is the current level of rent arrears owed by tenants? I am asking due to the Household Support Fund closing in March, the energy price cap increasing by at least £94 this month and given some council tenants are some of the financially challenged. This cold weather spell will affect a lot of hard pressed people who are going to have to spend more of their fixed and limited incomes on heating their homes this winter.

Private rents are also expected to increase by about 5% during 2024. The Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) rose by 4.2% in the 12 months to December 2023.

Given inflation is currently now at 4.2 % does the council feel it's wise to be increasing rents by a further 7.7% in April on asking its tenants for an over inflation increase especially given the state of disrepair of some of its housing stock currently, and the level of its arrears could put more people into debt, and/or further debt. Not to mention at risk of losing their home.

**13. From Councillor Walker to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

It is good to see mention of the ongoing problems with local bus routes in both the leader's and Cllr. Blakemore's reports. There was a further public meeting attended by Joel Mitchell last week where residents once again spoke of the frustration caused by the reduction in, and unreliability of services.

Broadmead residents have no service at all at weekends leaving them unable to get into town for local services or local supermarkets if they do not have access to a car.

Given that this council would support a reduction in the use of the private car and the promotion of more sustainable transport and recognising that not all residents are capable of riding a bike or walking long distances, will Cllr Martin be able to reassure us that talks will continue and pressure will be maintained and that this council will work hard to ensure that some services are restored?

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

During the last council administration, I asked if something could be done to save the White Lion Public House in Cheriton before it deteriorated any further. I was told that there was nothing that could be done as the owners

had plans for the site. Later a motion was put to full council by Cllr Peter Gane asking that FHDC make a compulsory purchase of the building as nothing had been done to the building and it was deteriorating at speed the motion however fell. Therefore I would like to know why a 215 has only just been placed on the building now and why this was not done before the building got into the state it's in now and not between 2019 and 2023?

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

Together with a fellow councillor we were invited to visit two families that are living in Warren Close, both families have two children one of the children is a 17-week-old baby. Both of the houses have damp, and the residents are having to seal the windows and doors with tape to stop drafts coming through. In one of the houses the carpet of the previous tenant was left, and it was infested with fleas and the resident a single mother was left to take up carpet herself and she also had to dispose of it herself. Work that has been carried out in each house was of poor quality, appointments are changed or broken at the last minute and residents wait weeks and sometimes months for repairs to start.

Why does it take Mears so long to complete repairs and what checks are carried out on the work that Mears complete on behalf of FHDC on our housing stock?

16. **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 houses on age designated estates where the properties are cramped and have very little secure outside space?