

FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 24 January 2024

Present: Councillors Mike Blakemore, Polly Blakemore, James Butcher, Bridget Chapman, Tony Cooper, Laura Davison, Gary Fuller, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Rich Holgate, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Anita Jones (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), 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 Abena Akuffo-Kelly

64. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

65. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chair.

66. **Chair's Communications**

In the Chair's absence, there were no communications, but the Vice-Chair wished the Chair well, and stated that she hoped to see her back at the next Full Council meeting.

67. **Petitions**

There were no petitions.

68. **Questions from the Public**

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

69. **Questions from Councillors**

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

70. **Announcements of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader gave the following announcements:

1. "I would like to wish all members and officers a very happy new year and I hope it will be a good one, I know it will be a challenging one!"

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2. I was delighted to be a guest at the Cheriton Community Centre for the Nepalese Community to welcome me as Leader.
3. The leaders of the four political groups and Independent Councillor Paul Thomas have been meeting regularly as we move towards a committee system.
4. I have attended many meetings regarding Otterpool Park with government agencies, developers and potential Joint Venture Partners and these discussions continue.
5. I attended a training session with many other Council representatives in my role as Armed Forces Champion.
6. I have been delighted to visit many businesses in our District, including Euro Tunnel, which was fascinating. I committed this Council to do whatever we can to help Euro Tunnel face the further challenges of Border Control which when introduced this summer may slow access to the Port of Dover and the Euro Tunnel site. This Council is a friend to good business.
7. Princes Parade hoarding: I am delighted to announce that the hording 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.
8. Following their announcement of cuts to local bus services I have been in almost daily contact with Stagecoach to discuss, indeed I recently attended a 6.00am meeting at Dover Bus Garage to establish for myself the feelings of the relocated drivers from Folkestone.
9. 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 further meetings with Southern Water and KCC Councillors this month.
10. Along with many coastal District Councils I attended a 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.
11. 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.
12. I joined FHDC's excellent Licencing team on their regular Saturday night patrol around Folkestone. I was amazed the warm welcome we received in every pub and restaurant we went into, clearly the licencing team is seen as part of the solution to many of the nighttime economy problems and not seen as the enemy by licensees.
13. I joined our local police force on a daytime patrol in the centre of Folkestone to see for myself the types of problems they encounter. On the run up to Christmas the patrol officers are particularly on the look out

for shop lifters, street crime and organised begging. I was impressed by the individual officers knowledge and understanding of the specific problems that affect Folkestone.

14. I was delighted to attend the Panto, Beauty and the Beast at the Leas Cliff Hall.
15. I spent a morning with our front-line staff who answer the telephone and deal with all the problems our residents have. To say I was impressed by the care and understanding exhibited by our team is an understatement.
16. Without doubt my most pleasurable task this month was to join colleagues as we said goodbye to Karen Everett after 46 years of excellent service to this Council. Karen is a remarkable person, loved by colleagues and residents alike. We all wished Karen well in her new adventure and she will be greatly missed. He proposed a vote of thanks for 46 years of service to Karen Everett.

Councillor McConville, Leader of the Labour Group then responded to the announcements and stated he supported the vote of thanks for any staff members who commits so much time to helping local residents. Regarding the never-ending sagas with those organisations that begin with S – he indicated that in respect of Stagecoach he would like to thank the work of local councillors who are undertaking work within their wards, constantly in contact with residents, and trying to do as much as possible to offer hope of restoration of key services. In respect of Border control, he stated that this is timely. He added that it's an important issue and should have more focus. If the planned biometric checks are introduced on 6 October 2024, it's widely reported that there will be prolonged and detrimental impact to residents and businesses in the district. All members should receive more information on this from some of key partners/stakeholders, such as the Kent Resilience Forum, Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover. With regard to issues faced by councils in East Kent he suggested that Members would benefit from more information sharing on those details. With the precarious financial situation within KCC, these issues will be on us sooner rather than later, and the situation with care leavers was likely just the tip of the iceberg. As for the Committee system, he indicated he would save his views for the debate later in the agenda.

Councillor Mrs Hollingbee also responded and wished everyone a Happy New Year, adding that it would be a challenging year. She thanked the Leader for his report, and indicated support for his contact with Southern Water, the Environment Agency and Stagecoach. She added that as the Leaders Deputy representative for Armed Forces, she had attended the Lord Lieutenants cadets award at Greenwich University, which had been an interested evening. In respect of the Licensing team, she reiterated how great the team were, but stated that all staff work hard, and this is why she was keen for the Customer Service Excellence work to continue, so people can see how hard staff worked, and enabling staff to feel proud. She stated that joining the Police force for a patrol was also a great idea, and she highlighted the work of the Community Safety Unit, and the partnership working which was quite amazing and a credit

to the council. She indicated that she was pleased to join Karen on her final day. She had known her for the 29 years she had been a Councillor, and Karen was always helpful, with nothing being too much trouble. She indicated she would therefore welcome the Leaders proposal. In respect of the Hoarding at Princes Parade, she believed the council should have waited until after the consultation before deciding what to do with it, rather than erect temporary fencing that may need to be changed again, as this was a waste of money.

The Leader of the Council then responded to the points raised by the Opposition Group Leaders and added that the key issue for him was the quality of the bathing water in the district, and issues around Southern Water. Whilst Stagecoach had engaged with the council, explaining their position, which he understood, he could not understand Southern Water's position at all. They had been doing testing and investigations for years, and it was so frustrating. In respect of Karen, and her 46 years of fantastic service, he added that she had been nicknamed 'Corporate Karen', and she would be sorely missed.

The Chair then led the Chamber in a round of applause for Karen Everett.

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).

71. Portfolio Holder reports to Council

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

72. Opposition Business

There was no Opposition Business.

73. Motions on Notice

The Leader of the Council outlined his motion which asked for the implementation of the new governance arrangements to be moved to May 2025.

Proposed by Councillor J Martin,
Seconded by Councillor M Blakemore; and

RESOLVED:

That this council believes that the current work on this important project should continue with the view of introducing the changes in May 2025. The proposed governance changes will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee and Full Council for approval. This will allow more time for all councillors to be familiar with, and understand, the changes involved in the move to a committee system of governance.

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

FOR: Councillors M Blakemore, P Blakemore, Butcher, Goddard, Godfrey, Holgate, Mrs Hollingsbee, A Martin, E Martin, J Martin, Scoffham, Shoob, Speakman, Thomas, Wimble and Wing (16).

AGAINST: Councillors Chapman, Cooper, Davison, Fuller, Keen, Lockwood, McConville, McShane, Meade, Prater and Walker (11).

ABSTENTIONS: Councillor Jones (1).

(Voting figures: 16 for, 11 against, 1 abstention).

74. **Refresh of the Council's Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy 2023 and general update**

The Council is part of the statutory safeguarding role within the wider public sector, with responsibilities to children, young people and vulnerable adults. The children, young people and vulnerable adults safeguarding policy of the Council has been updated and is attached at Appendix 1. Council are advised of the changes made to the 2023 policy as the refresh takes place every two years. Council are also advised of the wide range of activity that has taken place over the last few years year with updates on safeguarding practice. Due to the nature of the content of the safeguarding policy Council are presented with a public version (available on the website).

Proposed by Councillor M Blakemore,
Seconded by Councillor E Martin; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report C/23/20 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the updated safeguarding policy be agreed and adopted.**

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

75. **Review of polling districts and polling places 2023**

Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by Part 4 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006) places a duty on the Council to conduct a review of polling places and polling districts every four years. The last review was concluded by Folkestone & Hythe District Council in September 2019. The report outlined the steps the Council is taking to comply with this duty and sought approval from Council to approve the recommendations made in the latest review which concluded on 17 November 2023.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor Fuller; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/23/21 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the recommendations as outlined in Appendix 2 be adopted, with the implementation to coincide with the revision or alteration of the electoral register on 1 February 2024.**

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

76. Second Home and Empty Home Council Tax Premiums

The report re-affirmed a decision passed on 22 February 2023 by Full Council under report number A/22/25. This is due to a delay in Royal Assent being received and therefore a delay of 12 months from the previous decision.

From 1 April 2025, billing authorities will be given the ability to add a Council Tax premium to second homes. Billing authorities will also be given the ability to amend existing long term empty home Council Tax premiums from 1 April 2024. This report reviews these proposals and recommends that some changes are introduced from the financial year 2024/25 and other from the financial year 2025/26.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor Shoob; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/23/22 be received and noted.**
- 2. That a Council Tax premium be introduced to second homes from the 2025/26 financial year onwards.**
- 3. That amendments to the Council Tax empty home premiums from the 2024/25 financial year onwards as demonstrated in Table 2 be adopted.**

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

77. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28

The Medium Term Financial Strategy ('MTFS') is the Council's key financial planning document. It puts the financial perspective on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, expressing the aims and objectives of the various plans and strategies in financial terms over the four year period ending 31st March 2028. It covers both revenue and revenue implications for capital spend for the General Fund. Also included are the Council's reserves policies. The MTFS is a key element of sound corporate governance and financial management.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor Fuller; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/23/23 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as appended to the report, be adopted.**

3. That the Reserves Policy outlined in appendix 3 of the report, be adopted.

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

78. Committee Membership Changes

The report advised on changes to the political balance of Folkestone and Hythe District Council, following the resignation of Councillor Liz Grant on 14 December 2023. It also set out the appointments since the last Council meeting, under Part 8.1 of the constitution, 'Delegation to Officers', paragraph 3.16, which authorises the Chief Executive to make appointments to committees or sub-committees at the request of the relevant political group leader.

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

RESOLVED:

That report A/23/19 be received and noted.

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