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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, 25 September 2019

Present: Councillors Mrs Ann Berry (Chairman), Danny Brook, Miss Susan Carey, John Collier, Laura Davison, Michelle Dorrell, Gary Fuller, Peter Gane, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Anthony Hills, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Nicola Keen, Jim Martin, Philip Martin (Vice-Chair), Connor McConville, Jackie Meade, Ian Meyers, David Monk, Terence Mullard, Stuart Peall, Tim Prater, Patricia Rolfe, Rebecca Shoob, Georgina Treloar, Douglas Wade, Lesley Whybrow, David Wimble and John Wing

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Ray Field

40. Questions from Councillors

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

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3 From Councillor Rolfe to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

On 1st July 2019, the Church of England launched a Digital Charter that aims to establish guidelines and boundaries for good practice when using electronic and social media. This blueprint for respectful behaviour is, I believe, relevant to every representative of any 'organisation or group' and indeed, every one of us as individuals – and it can be adopted, applied and followed whether we have faith or not. Anti-social behaviour on digital platforms undermines the very fabric of our global society. Issues such as online bullying affect all ages and sectors. Research has also shown that many people – particularly our younger generation, find it difficult to disseminate between what is true, and what is not. Hence this also aspires to combat the ever-increasing problem of 'Fake News' and its negative impacts.

Therefore, my question to you is: In recognition of the leadership role of this authority's members and officers, and the associated moral obligation to set a good example for our local residents, can this District Council consider incorporating a Digital Charter and associated guidelines based on the values contained within the Church of England's blueprint, into its Corporate Plan? This could include, but not necessarily be limited to proactively embracing the key principles outlined in the Charter: <https://www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-social-mediacommunity-> guidelines of truth, respect, honesty, kindness and personal accountability. Essentially advocating that we should all aim to treat others as we, ourselves, would like to be treated and learn to present opposing views in a reasonable and fair manner without recourse to offensive or intimidating behaviour.

For your information, I believe that our local MP – Damian Collins would support such an initiative.

ANSWER:

Officers are currently updating a social media policy for Councillors. We support the values of the charter Councillor Rolfe has highlighted and will look to work up something similar in due course. We will review whether this will be incorporated into the Corporate Plan.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Linked to this, can this District Council also endorse the Government's drive to persuade social media providers of digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to accept that they are 'Producers' and as such should be held accountable for published content in clearly defined circumstances? This would help to ensure that these providers police their networks and have in place the necessary safeguards to protect the vulnerable. To that end would it be possible for you to send a letter on behalf of this Council evidencing such support to the Minister of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – the Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP and copy our MP into this due to his role as Chairman

of the Select Committee for DCMS? I strongly believe this to be a 'Community Safety' issue that is worth pursuing.

ANSWER:

Whilst I agree with the sentiment, I will check the procedure before writing a letter on behalf of the Council.

I am presently drafting a letter ready to send to the Minister of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

5. From Councillor Treloar to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Given this council's decision to build on and desecrate a key heritage asset in our area – the Royal Military Canal, which is a scheduled monument – how does it propose to manage with sensitivity and respect its new acquisition, the heritage-listed Westenhanger Castle?

ANSWER:

We are not planning to build on the Canal, we are planning to build on Princes Parade. Westenhanger Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Listed Building due to its historic importance, therefore the castle is protected from detrimental change by rigorous planning controls. However it also needs to have a long term sustainable future and there is a strong case (supported by statutory agencies) that this could best be achieved by bringing it into public ownership as a community asset within the wider Otterpool Park project. The council is preparing a 30 year plan for the castle setting out short, medium and long term investment ration, and scoping future public access and future uses that can bring an income to allow the castle to be self-sustaining.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Prior to the purchase of the castle, did you undertake a risk assessment, and when can we expect to see this document?

ANSWER:

I will provide a comprehensive response in writing after the meeting.

Prior to purchase of the castle the council commissioned consultants to advice on future development and use of the castle, and valuation analysis. The report findings were appraised and discussed with Historic England. This supplemented the work previously done by consultants Arcadis to prepare the Statement of Significance for the castle which included an assessment of its condition. All immediate risks in the day to day running and maintenance of the castle are the responsibility of the tenant, Idyllic Events, and the council will continue the liaison closely with Idyllic in the preparation of the 30 year plan for the castle.

We would welcome discussion with individual councillors to discuss the castle in further detail.

7. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Will you make a statement on the Yellowhammer papers in relation to the impact on our district?

ANSWER:

The “Yellowhammer papers” gave the worst case scenario planning assumptions. Our council has participated fully in Brexit planning, working through the Kent Resilience Forum. Our priority is to minimise any potential impact and disruption in the delivery of council services and to ensure that our communities are prepared.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The use of foodbanks has raised by 85% in our community since last year. There is an extreme fear around what would happen in the event of a no deal Brexit. What emergency procedures has the council got in dealing with this issue, and will you publish the business continuity plan for each council department, as previously promised to my colleague.

ANSWER:

I will provide a structured answer after the meeting.

The Council’s Brexit contingency planning concentrates on the Council providing its core functions as closely to normal as possible. Supporting foodbanks is not a core function of the Council. Having said this, the Council has provided a list of all known food banks in the area to the Kent Resilience Team to allow them to make contact should they think this is necessary. The Kent Resilience Team have carried out a lot of work on supply chains and central government are not predicting a shortage of food. Tesco and Morrisons have been contacted about their donations to foodbanks in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Both supermarkets confirmed that their existing supply model will continue which means that there is naturally some ‘waste’ at the end of each day which is currently donated to foodbanks, and will continue to be in the event of a no-deal.

The Council has just appointed a Brexit Coordinator which is a full time post and will provide a single point of contact within the District for Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, members of the public and businesses. The impacts on our communities following a no deal Brexit on October 31st will be collated daily by the Council and fed into the Kent Resilience Team and its strategic partners. Our Communities and Area Officer teams will also be out and about liaising with our communities and feeding back information to us and other support partners.

The Council's Business Continuity Plan will be shared following another update which will be completed in the next few weeks. If there are any specific questions relating to Brexit and our Business Continuity Plans Officers will be happy to help. Following the last Brexit briefing for members in September a further meeting has been set up on October 15th when Members of the Kent Resilience Forum will attend to provide an overview of our Councillors role in an Emergency and Brexit preparations. There will be an opportunity for questions to be answered further at this meeting.

8. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Now that it would be illegal for there to be a no deal Brexit what are the conditions surrounding any unspent monies allocated for preparing for this purpose?

ANSWER:

There are no conditions on any unspent monies. The central government funding provided for Brexit was paid under section 31 arrangements whereby there are no conditions on how that it spent. Clearly the government has provided this to help support any disruption which Brexit, in whatever form, may cause and we will ensure the funds are spent appropriately.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

How much money is left in the tin?

ANSWER:

I will provide a comprehensive answer after the meeting.

We received £607,692 and have spent £860, so £606,832 left available.

13. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

Is it right that political decisions about how to spend £2.2 million pounds of the Future High Street Fund rest solely in the hands of the leader of the council and one Corporate Director?

ANSWER:

The Leader is establishing a cross party Folkestone Town Centre subgroup of council members and the intention is that this group will be consulted on with respect to major proposals for spending the £2.2 million allocation of the Folkestone & Hythe High Street Fund to Folkestone Town Centre initiatives. However, the final decisions will be taken by the Leader and the Corporate Director for Place and Commercial.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Do you agree that the appalling loss of Thomas Cook and Debenhams and the devastating impact on its workforce, customers and local economy, we are at crisis point for our high streets and the least we can do is to involve our community and their creative ideas in meaningful decisions about their own town. Therefore don't you agree that the Folkestone town centre working group you refers to should meet in public and that its chair should be elected by the group and not appointed by the leader?

ANSWER:

I will provide a response in due course.

The failure of these two national retailers is extremely disappointing for Folkestone town centre and for all the other town centres where these retailers are currently sited. The Council is actively working with the owners of the Debenhams property and the owners of Bouverie Place to bring forward a new development for Folkestone Town Centre and these proposals will be consulted upon in due course and there will be plenty of opportunities for the public to contribute their ideas and raise their concerns. The Leader has established a dedicated Folkestone Town Centre Working Group which will advise and shape our future plans. The Council will also be seeking views on the future of the High Street through a Market Research study which is soon to commence. This forms part of the preparations and consultations for developing a vision and masterplan for Folkestone Town Centre. Researchers will be undertaking face to face interviews with more than 1000 residents, visitors and businesses during October and November 2019 and there will be opportunities for the public to submit their views online too.

Working group meetings are not open to the public. They are not formal meetings of the Council as such. The Chair of the working group and members of the working group are appointed by the Leader.

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