



Our district Our world

Enhancing prosperity
and well-being for all

Corporate Plan Annual Report 2026

The five themes guiding our plan

We've based our plan on the five themes shown in this diagram. **Leadership** is key to delivering change so it's shown at the top.

Economy, **home** and **community** are shown in the centre. These are all closely related, for example: people need a place to live to get work; people need a stable and comfortable home to be part of their community; and businesses need a healthy and skilled workforce to prosper.

Nature is shown at the bottom because all life ultimately depends on the natural world.

We believe that focussing our resources on these themes will ensure that the district remains a great place to live, as we continue to improve our services.

While we'll focus our resources on the services we deliver directly, we hope to see positive impacts in the wider world too – that's why we've called our plan '**Our district, our world**'.

Sustainable Development Goals

Under each of the themes on the next five pages you can see square coloured symbols. These are the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations. These 17 goals have been agreed by countries and organisations around the world to guide their work.

Improving people's health, wellbeing and sense of community
Community

The goals cover a wide range of topics, including people's health, equality, wellbeing, economic growth, good governance and the environment.

Although the goals may change in the future, we think they provide a valuable checklist to see where our actions could have wider benefits. Relevant symbols are shown under each of the five themes to help us identify these benefits.

A well-run, listening council that works closely with its partners
Leadership

Building new homes, improving the quality of existing homes and tackling homelessness
Home

Enhancing our local environment and supporting climate action
Nature

Growing the economy in a sustainable way and creating opportunities for all
Economy



Welcome to our corporate plan 'Our district, our world'

Enhancing prosperity and well-being for all

Welcome to the council's corporate plan for 2025 – 2030 and to this annual report on the progress we have made during 2025/26. This year has seen us turn our shared ambitions into action, building on strong foundations and delivering positive change for our residents, visitors and businesses, working closely with our communities, partners and stakeholders.

Our progress in year one reflects both the breadth of services we deliver and the improvements we are making to ensure they are efficient, effective and accessible. It also reflects the value of partnership working, whether through supporting health and well-being, strengthening our local economy, improving housing, or taking action to protect and enhance our environment.

The plan itself was shaped through a wide-ranging consultation exercise, and throughout 2025/26 we have continued to listen to residents, tenants, young people, businesses and communities. Your views and ambitions have helped guide our priorities and have informed the work highlighted in this report.

Sustainability remains at the heart of this plan. We know we must continue to live within our means, but we are equally committed to ensuring that the council's work responds to the needs of residents now and in the future. In year one, that has meant balancing sound financial management with continued investment in well-being initiatives, the local economy and environmental action.

We are fortunate to have an outstanding district, from our spectacular coastline to our beautiful rural communities, and this year we have continued to build on that strength. Progress on projects such as the 'Folkestone: A Brighter Future' project, the Coast Drive destination project, new affordable homes, youth engagement, climate action and support for local businesses shows the scale of both our ambition and our delivery.

Our residents and communities remain central to everything we do. The progress made during 2025/26 reflects our commitment to improving people's everyday lives, creating opportunity, supporting those in need and helping our district to thrive.

We also recognise the vital role we play in working with partners to address the issues that matter most to local people, from transport, roads and water quality to housing, health and economic opportunity. This report shows how, in the first year of the plan, we have strengthened that role and delivered meaningful progress for the benefit of all.

Councillor Jim Martin, Leader

Susan Priest, Chief Executive

LEADERSHIP / THEME 1:

A well-run, listening council that works closely with its partners

Overview

We are responsible for a wide range of services, most of which we must provide by law. Under our **Leadership** theme we have made commitments to deliver high quality, accessible services for all, with a focus on supporting those who are vulnerable or face barriers to getting help, while keeping our finances balanced to protect frontline services.

Through our Corporate Plan we have made a commitment to provide strong local leadership, working closely with our partners, widening engagement and ensuring transparent decision-making. We will champion residents' voices, invest ethically as a Fair Tax organisation, and be a fair employer.

Guiding principles:

- Being open, democratic and building trust in all we do
- Balancing the council's budget and spending wisely
- Engaging meaningfully with the community
- Delivering services that are easy for everyone to access and support people in need

Key leadership achievements

- **Improved governance and decision-making** by completing stakeholder engagement and preparing for local government re-organisation
- **Strengthened financial planning and controls** by approving the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Annual Budget and Treasury Strategy, and implementing a new financial management system
- **Enhanced workforce inclusivity and equality** by embedding the Reasonable Adjustments Policy and approving a new Equality & Diversity Policy
- **Improved customer access and accountability** by approving a Customer Access Strategy and strengthening complaints handling and reporting arrangements
- **Strengthened housing services and tenant engagement** by completing the Annual Tenants' Survey with improved satisfaction across all measures and preparing successfully for regulatory inspection
- **Expanded community and youth engagement** by delivering two Youth Forum cohorts and progressing Local Plan engagement, including securing external funding

Sustainable Development Goals



LEADERSHIP / THEME 1: A well-run, listening council that works closely with its partners



Students representing the district's schools and colleges joined the council's youth forum to share views on future plans for where they live.

During two sessions students learned about the democratic process and discussed topics such as solar farms, social media and the new play area at Folkestone's Lower Leas Coastal Park.

The young people, aged between 13 and 19, were from The Beacon, Brockhill Park, EKC Folkestone Junior College, Folkestone School for Girls, The Harvey Grammar School and The Marsh Academy.



Investment enabling thousands of tonnes of freight heading across the Channel to be carried by rail again has been welcomed.

Councillors worked with Network Rail for 18 months supporting its plan to upgrade the freight link between Folkestone and London enabling regular intermodal freight trains to carry cargo in containers.

It is estimated this could lead to the removal of 140,000 lorry journeys from the M20 every year, reducing congestion and carbon emissions.



An improved council tax reduction scheme further helping working age, low-income households has been introduced.

The council developed a revised approach – offering up to 100% support – in response to the rise in the cost of living and the withdrawal of incentive funding by Kent County Council.

Other help for residents has included help through the Home Essential Fund project; supporting vulnerable customers through welfare and outreach and developing a Customer Access Strategy.

COMMUNITY / THEME 2:

Improving people's health, wellbeing and sense of community

Overview

Our **Community** theme highlights the importance of reducing anti-social behaviour, providing leisure facilities, public transport and walking and cycling routes, and we have included these as priorities. In conversations about the plan, many people also told us they felt lonely and isolated, so we've also included reducing social isolation as a priority.

Working with partners to encourage people to lead more active lives – whether volunteering or taking up sports – can have many benefits, including improving people's health and reducing loneliness.

Guiding principles:

- Supporting improvements to people's health, wellbeing and safety
- Supporting walking, cycling and public transport
- Celebrating diversity
- Welcoming everyone and removing barriers to access
- Promoting community engagement, activity and creativity

Key community achievements

- **Improved community safety and well-being** through delivery of the Community Safety Partnership Plan, targeted interventions, and a programme of safety events and campaigns
- **Delivered a wide programme of community events** including safety, well-being and awareness initiatives, supporting early intervention and public engagement
- **Strengthened sports and active living initiatives** through delivery of funded programmes, including expanded projects supporting young people and community participation
- **Enhanced support for communities and voluntary sector** through networking events, community hubs and ongoing collaboration to address wellbeing and social isolation
- **Improved cultural, heritage and tourism offer** by revamping Folkestone & Hythe: 'Experience the Extraordinary' website and engaging with heritage groups
- **Supported food security and sustainability initiatives** through the District Food Network, community food projects and expanded support to local households

Sustainable Development Goals



COMMUNITY / THEME 2: Improving people's health, wellbeing and sense of community



Councillors agreed a £2.4m grant to help re-open swimming facilities at Folkestone Sports Centre.

The funding supports essential work to the pool area, provision of solar panels and repairs to the roof as part of The Sport Trust's revitalisation of the Radnor Park site.

It is hoped that the pool will re-open during 2026 and enable community swimming and the associated health and social benefits to be available once again.



Further support has been pledged by charities and organisations for military veterans and active personnel in the district.

At an event organised by the council at the Folkestone Nepalese Community Centre, several veterans spoke about the issues surrounding the return to civilian life.

Council Leader Jim Martin said that it is the role of all community organisations to make sure that military personnel know that help is available.



More than 90 people joined workshops to bring together the story of Folkestone for a bid to become the UK's first Town of Culture.

Expressing an interest in gaining the accolade, it was highlighted that whilst the town has undergone a transformation in its creativity and reinvention, Folkestone has experienced the long-term effects of economic decline, particularly in East Folkestone and the harbour area.

The lasting legacy of the work to date has been to collect information from groups, organisations, event organisers and local creatives.

HOME / THEME 3: Building new homes, improving the quality of existing homes and tackling homelessness

Overview

We have invested significantly in improving our council homes, over the past five years, and under our **Home** theme, this work will continue. But many people depend on the private rental market for a home, so we have also made commitments to work with tenants and landlords to improve the quality of these homes.

The government has set high targets for housebuilding that councils must meet. We will use our new Local Plan to make sure that homes are built in the right places with the right infrastructure, including at the new garden town of Otterpool Park, with sustainable homes that enhance their surroundings.

Guiding principles:

- Offering frontline support to people who are homeless
- Building more council homes and affordable homes
- Working with tenants to ensure landlords deliver good quality homes for rent
- Improving the energy efficiency and comfort of our council homes

Key home achievements

- **Strengthened homelessness prevention and support** by working with partners to reduce rough sleeping and preventing or relieving homelessness for more than 230 households
- **Expanded and improved temporary accommodation** provision by securing additional capacity, including investment to acquire new units and strengthen private sector supply
- **Delivered new homes and increased housing supply** through new build and acquisition programmes, bringing empty homes back into use and supporting town centre redevelopment schemes
- **Improved the quality of private sector housing** by upgrading nearly 300 homes through enforcement, adaptations and energy efficiency measures
- **Strengthened housing strategy and planning** by publishing the Housing Delivery Action Plan and supporting delivery through the Local Plan process
- **Improved the quality and sustainability of council homes** by delivering energy efficiency improvements and increasing compliance with Decent Homes and safety standards

Sustainable Development Goals



HOME / THEME 3: Building new homes, improving the quality of existing homes and tackling homelessness



Council tenants began moving into new affordable rent homes at the Risborough Barracks development in Shorncliffe, Folkestone, in February.

44 homes were purchased through the council's Housing Revenue Account and all available for affordable rent.

All the homes have been built to achieve an EPC rating of B, supporting lower energy bills for residents while contributing to the council's wider carbon-reduction ambitions.



The council has provided six new homes in the rural village of Lyminge as part of its ongoing pledge to create more affordable, energy efficient homes in the district.

The properties are let to tenants on the housing list at affordable rents and are part of the council's planning agreement with the house builder to ensure that new developments contribute to local infrastructure and community need. The new homes have an EPC rating of B and support the council's carbon reduction strategy.



Providing 8,500 new homes at Otterpool Park has been brought a step closer following a Collaboration Agreement with Homes England. The council has been working with the government's housing and regeneration agency with the intention of securing planning agreement for the scheme.

The collaboration has given the council access to the additional skills and expertise necessary to successfully complete the high-quality scheme and attract the level of investment required to deliver at this scale.

ECONOMY / THEME 4: Growing the economy in a sustainable way and creating opportunities for all

Overview

Under our **Economy** theme, we have been exploring opportunities for innovation, infrastructure and investment to support businesses. We've delivered the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and we've promoted Folkestone Works, the council's investment and advice website. Small actions can make a big difference, such as advising local firms how they can bid for council contracts, keeping prosperity in the local economy.

While the district has strengths in the cultural and creative sectors, we've also been exploring how we can work with partners to promote the district and provide training to take advantage of other growing sectors, such as green technologies.

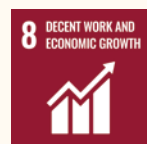
Guiding principles:

- Supporting innovation and training
- Providing new infrastructure
- Reducing inequality
- Helping to build the green economy
- Investing in towns and villages throughout the district

Key economy achievements

- **Promoted apprenticeships and skills development** by supporting training and employment opportunities linked to growing and sustainable industries
- **Supported local businesses and local spending** by delivering projects that encourage residents and visitors to spend locally and keep prosperity within the district
- **Improved access to council contracts for small businesses** by actively engaging local suppliers and promoting procurement opportunities
- **Supported the transition to clean energy** by backing renewable and low carbon energy initiatives that respect protected landscapes and habitats
- **Supported food production and land management** by backing initiatives that benefit both the natural environment and the local economy
- **Delivered and progressed major regeneration and infrastructure investment** by advancing Levelling Up Fund improvements in Folkestone town centre and encouraging investment across towns and villages in the Romney Marsh and North Downs

Sustainable Development Goals



ECONOMY / THEME 4: Growing the economy in a sustainable way and creating opportunities for all



Work is underway on Folca 2, the Art Deco section of the council owned former Folkestone department store.

A local construction company is ensuring the structure is watertight and ready for the next chapter in its history - a proposed medical centre.

Folca 1 - the Edwardian section – is also set for refurbishment which could see the upper floors converted into flats and commercial space on the ground floor.



Changing Tides - a new beachside destination at Greatstone developed by the council is due to open this summer.

The Coast Drive centre will include 93 wooden beach huts, water sports facilities and a café concession with a training room.

Public toilets, including an accessible Changing Places facility, and a remodelled car park with electric charging stations have also been constructed.



Skills programmes to strengthen the local economy and support small business growth across the district have been launched by the council.

Independent businesses and hospitality venues in Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and New Romney – as well as rural enterprises across the Romney Marsh and North Downs – will receive support.

The High Streets Connect and Grow Rural initiatives are both funded from central government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund UKSPF)

NATURE / THEME 5: Enhancing our local environment and supporting climate action

Overview

The environment emerged as a strong theme during engagement on this plan. Local people are naturally concerned at the issues affecting their neighbourhood, and water pollution was highlighted as a key issue – we will continue to press water companies for action to address this on behalf of residents.

Under the Nature theme, we will focus on the services we provide, including ensuring that streets and green spaces are clean and welcoming, but we also believe that by carefully considering our impacts on nature and the climate, we can also have a positive impact on the wider world.

Guiding principles:

- Protecting our waters, rivers and coast
- Protecting our countryside and enhancing the diversity of plant and animal life
- Delivering high-quality developments that respect local character
- Reducing carbon emissions and adapting to our changing climate

Key nature achievements

- **Maintained Green Flag status** for all our flagship parks (Kingsnorth Gardens, Radnor Park, Royal Military Canal and Lower Leas Coastal Park)
- **Protected and enhanced biodiversity** by supporting habitat management, delivering Green Grants projects and contributing to the Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- **Strengthened environmental quality in new development** by progressing East Kent Design Codes and influencing design, energy efficiency and place making standards
- **Supported recycling, reuse and waste reduction** through continued communications, campaigns and partnership working with voluntary groups
- **Advanced climate action and carbon reduction** by adopting a revised district-wide Carbon Plan aligned with Kent & Medway targets
- **Supported climate resilience and adaptation** by securing funding and delivering coastal protection and beach management works, and working with landowners to reduce climate risks

Sustainable Development Goals

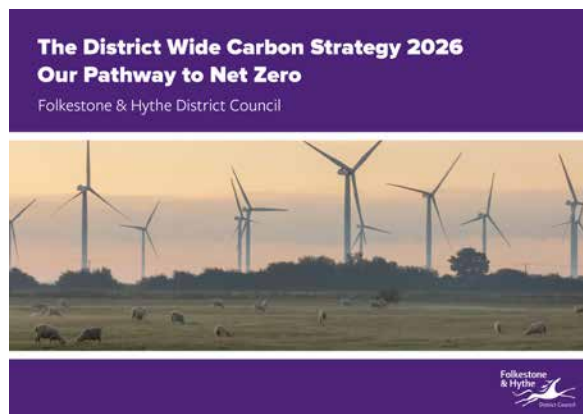


NATURE / THEME 5: Enhancing our local environment and supporting climate action



The district beach management programme successfully defended homes from Storm Goretta earlier this year.

The coastline was hit by unexpectedly forceful winds causing damage to various structures including Folkestone's Mermaid Beach breakwater, beach huts and benches. But crucially, there were no reports of flooding or damage to residential properties – nor injuries or harm to any residents – meaning the council's bi-annual recycling and regrading of shingle carried out since 2004 did its job effectively.



A blueprint for the district, setting out 54 actions to tackle the urgent challenges posed by climate change and ecological decline has been agreed by councillors. The carbon plan aims to achieve a net zero district by 2041 through measures include decarbonising electricity generation through renewables, shifting building heating towards low-carbon sources and improving public transport and cycling infrastructure. Residents' suggestions such as supporting low-income and vulnerable households have also been added to the plan.



More than 30 organisations including community groups, parish councils and schools benefitted from funding to support sustainability and carbon reduction projects across the district.

The Green Grant scheme supported a range of schemes including electrical recycling, tree planting, developing sensory gardens, restoring ponds, growing mushrooms on spent coffee grounds and installing solar panels. The scheme is being repeated during 2026/27 with a £250,000 package of support.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Our Corporate Plan is closely aligned to the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, ensuring that local action contributes to wider global priorities. Through the work delivered in 2025–26, the council has made clear progress against a number of the goals, including:



Good health and wellbeing (SDG 3) – by supporting community safety initiatives, tackling social isolation, promoting active lifestyles, and improving housing quality and tenant satisfaction.



Quality education and reduced inequalities (SDGs 4 & 10) – through youth engagement programmes and the Youth Forum, apprenticeships and skills initiatives, inclusive employment practices, and targeted support for vulnerable households.



Affordable & Clean Energy (SDG 7) – by supporting Solar Together Kent (group-buying solar panels for residents and businesses), installation of solar panels on 380 of the council's houses, and Green Grants and Business Grants supporting renewable energy projects.



Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) – by supporting local businesses, promoting apprenticeships, investing in regeneration projects, and encouraging local spending across towns and villages.



Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) – by delivering new homes, improving existing housing, bringing empty properties back into use, investing in infrastructure, and strengthening community engagement and local leadership.



Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) – through waste reduction and recycling campaigns, food security initiatives, community food projects, and support for reuse and repair.



Climate action and life on land (SDGs 13 & 15) – by adopting a revised district wide Carbon Plan, supporting biodiversity through Green Grants, Sustainable Futures Forum events enabling community-led climate action, protecting green spaces, and delivering coastal protection and climate resilience measures.



Across all five themes of the Corporate Plan, the Council's work demonstrates how **local delivery supports global goals**, helping to improve wellbeing, prosperity and environmental sustainability for current and future generations.



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Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Civic Centre,
Castle Hill Avenue, Folkestone, Kent, CT20 2QY

folkestone-hythe.gov.uk