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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, 21 June 2023

Present: Councillors Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Mike Blakemore, Polly Blakemore, James Butcher, 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, Liz McShane, Jackie Meade, Tim Prater, Rebecca Shoob, Jeremy Speakman, Paul Thomas, Belinda Walker and John Wing

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Stephen Scoffham and David Wimble

14. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

15. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2023 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chairman

16. **Chair's Communications**

The Chair gave the following communications:

“In the period since becoming chair, I have attended a number of engagements throughout the district and beyond including my first ever event as chair which was the unveiling of the portrait of the King at the Nepalese community centre. I have also been the guest of the mayors of both Lydd and Dartford and have attended two flag raising events to commemorate our armed forces. I am looking forward to the Armed Forces Day celebrations this weekend and the opening of an art project to observe refugee week.

I stayed true to my word and met with town and parish councillors across the district and have promised to attend their events but also to provide a link between them and the district council ensuring that all parts of this district are represented”.

17. **Petitions**

There were no petitions for consideration.

18. **Questions from the Public**

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

19. **Questions from Councillors**

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

20. **Announcements of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

“Good evening and welcome.

I have been extremely busy meeting all of the senior officers and Directors. I have also held meetings with Roger Gough the leader of KCC and Roger De Haan regarding the Seafront development in Folkestone. I have met with Damian Collins MP, I have had several meetings with Otterpool Park LLP.

I have also had meetings with residents, partners, schools and other stakeholders.

The subject of these meetings can be generally grouped as follows: Finance, Governance, Prince’s Parade, Otterpool, Folca, the levelling up fund, Folkestone Seafront, Romney Marsh and Folkestone Town Centre.

I have been delighted to meet many of the 422 people employed by FHDC and be asked to present the Recognition Awards for Customer Service.

I have attended the Kent Leaders Forum, the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership meeting and a meeting of the East Kent Leaders Forum.

I joined Luke Douglas-Home, known as ‘The Coastal Runner,’ from Folkestone to Hythe on World Ocean Day – as Luke continues his run around the UK’s coastline, collecting litter.

I was delighted to open the Marsh Inspires Careers Fair at the Marsh Academy.

I will be meeting Stagecoach on Friday to discuss the impact of their cuts to bus services in the District.

My diary is currently full with more meetings, visits and discussions with residents, partners and stakeholders in FHDC”.

The Leader of the Labour Group responded to the announcements with the following:

“Congratulations on your appointment, and I look forward to working with you where possible and challenging you where needed. There is not much to say at this point. I’m sure it will get more meaty as the year goes on. In your meeting with stagecoach, just to stress how important those small and seemingly insignificant those routes are some of our vulnerable residents. It would be useful to know exactly what Stagecoach would need to keep these services running in some form. I look forward to some feedback on that in due course”.

The Leader of the Conservative Group also responded to the announcements and made points including the following:

“Congratulations on being elected as Leader and thank you for your report. I was pleased to hear you are having meetings with partners and stakeholders. This is very important, and is how we achieve good results. I am particularly pleased to hear about the Marsh Inspire event. I have a great affection for the Marsh, as I spent 20 years teaching at the Marsh Academy. I look forward to hearing further reports and decisions at your next Leaders announcements”.

The Leader of the Council then responded to the points raised by both Opposition groups, and stated:

“Indeed the last time I attended the Marsh Inspire event I was invited by you. It has grown and was a terrific event today. I also take on board all of Councillor McConville’s points. He shared some good ideas with me earlier, and I will certainly be communicating them in a calm way. We will see what the response is from them”.

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

RESOLVED:

That the announcements of the Leader be noted.

(The recommendation was agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

21. **Portfolio Holder reports**

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

22. **Opposition Business**

Councillor McConville, on behalf of the Labour Group, outlined his opposition business which asked for consideration be given to establishing a district council grant Committee/Working Group to dispense community funds from 2024/25.

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Keen; and

RESOLVED:

That option (b) (Refer the issue to the Overview and Scrutiny committee for their observations before deciding whether to make a decision on the issue) be agreed for the business below:

To establish a District Council Grant Committee/working group to dispense community funds from 2024/25, ideally sourced from existing budgets.

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

23. **Motions on Notice**

Councillor Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance outlined his motion which proposed a change to the council's governance structure, to adopt a committee system of governance.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor McConville; and

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee System model of governance be adopted by Folkestone and Hythe District Council with effect from the Annual Council meeting in May 2024.
2. That a Constitution Working Group be convened, comprising of the Leader of each constituted Group (or their nominee) plus one Independent. The Working Group is instructed to consider and make recommendations to Full Council on the composition and terms of reference of committees by January 2024.
3. That the Independent Remuneration Panel be instructed to review the Scheme of Members' Allowances in light of the revised model of governance and make recommendations to Full Council by January 2024.
4. That the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Constitution Working Group, redrafts the Council's constitution to fit a committee system of governance and presents the revised constitution to Full Council for adoption by March 2024.
5. That it be noted that the council acknowledges that there will be a cost implication to this proposed change in Governance. A budget is to be made available of up to a maximum of £100k taken from general reserves in agreement with the S151 Officer and the Finance and Governance Portfolio Holder.

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

FOR: Councillors Akuffo-Kelly, M Blakemore, P Blakemore, Butcher, Chapman, Cooper, Davison, Fuller, Godfrey, Grant, Holgate, Jones, Keen, Lockwood, A Martin, E Martin, J Martin, McConville, McShane, Meade, Prater, Shoob, Speakman, Thomas, Walker and Wing (26).

AGAINST: Councillors Goddard and Mrs Hollingsbee (2).

ABSTENTIONS: None (0).

(Voting figures: 26 for, 2 against, 0 abstentions).

24. Amendment of delegation arrangements by the Leader of the Council

Under the Council's constitution the Leader of the Council decides on the delegation of cabinet functions. The Leader may amend the delegations at any time by giving written notice to the Head of the Paid Service. Where such a notice is received the Head of the Paid Service must submit a report on the amendments to the next ordinary meeting of the Council. The report sets out the amendments made by the Leader.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That report A/23/09 be received and noted.

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

25. Committee Membership Changes

Under the Folkestone and Hythe District Council Constitution, Part 8.1 'Delegation to Officers', paragraph 3.18, the Head of Paid Service is authorised to make appointments to committees or sub-committees at the request of the relevant political group leader. The report set out the appointments made, under these powers, on the instruction of the Leader of the Green Group.

Proposed by Councillor Jim Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee;

RESOLVED:

1. That report A/23/10 be received and noted.

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

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

RESOLVED:

2. That Councillor Wimble be appointed to the vacant seat on the Audit and Governance Committee.

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

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

RESOLVED:

3. That Councillor Butcher be elected Vice-Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

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

Council – 21 June 2023

Public Questions:

1. From Ms M Lawes to Councillor Martin, Leader of the Council

Will the Leader of this council meet with harbour residents' association, local residents & businesses of the Stade, to discuss with all partners in how to resolve all matters of concern and how we can improve the gridlock, safety, look, ambiance and enjoyment for locals, businesses and visitors.

RESPONSE:

Thank you for your question. Yes, I am delighted to say that I'd be happy to meet with representatives of all stakeholder groups initially and have asked officers to make the necessary arrangements. I'm liaising with the ward cllrs and have often discussed these topics with Cllr Keen in the past, and I know there is work to do. Thank you for drawing this to my attention and I look forward to meeting with residents of the Stade.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I would ask are you taking seriously the parking issues with some urgency as residents are unable to park? There is nowhere else to park other than Seaview park in the Stade.

ANSWER:

I will be taking this seriously. As previously mentioned I have already had discussions with the Cabinet Member, Councillor Polly Blakemore. In the past, Councillor Keen and I have often discussed the issues of parking with residents and vendors down there. Rest assured, there will not be an easy solution, but it is something we are taking very seriously.

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Council – 21 June 2023

Councillor Questions:

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

During Summer months we find the Stade and the Leas literally drowning in litter. I previously requested that extra bins and collections take place but could the Cabinet Member please look at arranging extra litter enforcement officers to patrol during the areas busiest times please?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

As a resident who lives near to the promenade, I am personally interested in how it looks, the level of service we receive from the contractors and minimising impact of litter on the wider environment.

In answer to your question about extra litter enforcement, I know that the Environmental Enforcement Officers are already deployed over the summer weekends and additional staff have been employed. I will certainly discuss where these patrols take place and if there can be more focus on the harbour.

Looking forward to the summer, I will continue to be working closely with officers to ensure that the contract is robustly monitored and where we can redeploy resources to meet seasonal demands this will done. I would also emphasise our regular public messaging and signage that if a litter bin is full to please take your litter home.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Going forward with your conversations with Veolia, can we look at increased litter pick ups as well from the bins? We are seeing visitors bring black sacks with them, and just dumping them next to the litter bins rather than taking them home. It can look like Armageddon sometimes after an event.

ANSWER:

The weekend before last, I went around first thing in the morning and it looked like a bomb site. I totally accept what you are saying, and I don't like it any more than you do, and we are looking closely at the tracking information to check that collections are happening later in the evenings as they should be.

2. From Councillor Meade to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control

Some areas of the district seem to be becoming the dog poo capital of Kent. Can the new cabinet member please look into launching a strong public

campaign reminding the admittedly small number of irresponsible dog owners who do not clear up after their pets, of the dangers to children from dog mess and that in fact it is a finable offence?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

As a responsible dog owner, I agree wholeheartedly that dog fouling is completely unacceptable, a potential hazard to health and offenders should be held to account.

In terms of action on this issue, I know that last year the council updated and renewed its Dog Control Public Space Protection Order. This is enforced through patrolling by the Environmental Enforcement Team. The council has also previously conducted publicity campaigns around dog fouling and indeed a new campaign 'Paws for Thought' is launching this week and the Enforcement Team will be running an event on Sunny Sands on Friday to publicise the campaign. Rest assured, I will be working with the Regulatory Services Team to keep attention on this issue and to make sure irresponsible dog owners have no excuse for dog fouling.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Could we spread the word in schools as well? Children will report back to their parents too. It's not just the beaches, it's alleyways where children walk to school. Any work you can do will be gratefully received.

ANSWER:

I completely understand it's important to get the message across to young people. The Enforcement Team have shared with me that it won't just be beaches but other hot spots in the district to spread the message. I will make sure it is particularly aimed at young people.

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

Now that Princes Parade has been saved from development can we please have an update on actions, in particular when the hideous hoardings will be removed?

ANSWER:

Councillor Meade, thank you for your very current and important question, and as you know, it's a topic close to my heart.

Following the ground investigations carried out for the Princes Parade development, the council now have a better understanding of the contamination present within the buried landfill material. As such, the site

cannot be simply reopened to the public, as the council has a duty of care to protect residents and visitors to Princes Parade from coming into direct contact with the contaminants.

At this time, I can give you no definitive date for the removal of the hoarding can be given. Officers will present a report to Cabinet in July outlining the resources required to establish what work the council needs to undertake to make the site safe and remove the hoarding. Please note that, I am counting the days.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can we work with local schools and consult young people, given then an opportunity to contribute ideas for what they would like to see on Princes Parade?

ANSWER:

Yes, yes, and yes to your three questions. The paper that I refer to will also include next steps in terms of opening the consultation for a potential park land and open space. I'm reluctant to say the word 'park' because that very much depends on the density of the contaminates in particular areas. Certainly rewilding, open space, and the key thing is to get views across the space, so we will get the hoardings down and replace with a lower level fence, so that people can see across the site.

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

As Labour Group Members now hold Chairman of the Council, chair and Vice Chair of Planning and Licensing, chair of Audit & Governance and Chair of Personnel, and Cabinet is made up of Greens and Lib Dems, could you please tell us who is running this administration?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your excellent question Councillor Hollingsbee. My simple answer to your question, who is running this administration? The answer is emphatically me! I do so however, with the great support of my deputy leader Councillor Prater, my coalition cabinet and with the cooperation of our friends in the Labour group. For too long party politics has got in the way of efficient running of this Council. I hope to begin an era of more inclusive cooperative politics.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

So, is this a three colour coalition?

ANSWER

Sadly, this is a two colour coalition. However, you will see later on the agenda, Councillor Prater is proposing a motion to move to a Committee system of governance, which again reinforces my hope and ambition for a more inclusive kind of politics.

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

On 4 April 2023, all opposition party members at the time (Green, Lib Dem and Labour) voted against the Otterpool Park new Garden Town planning application. Will this project go ahead or will this be cancelled like Princes Parade?

ANSWER:

Another excellent question, thank you Councillor Hollingsbee. I was indeed, one of the Councillors who voted against the grant of planning permission for Otterpool Park but you will recall from what I said at the committee meeting, the Otterpool Park garden village should be greener, more sustainable and have greater bio diversity. It now falls to me to deliver what I clearly stated at the committee meeting, and that is my intention. It is impossible to cancel Otterpool Park. If the land was sold, it would be sold with planning permission for 8,500 homes and would almost inevitably be developed by others. If we retained the land and chose not to develop it, the Council would be so far in debt we would be bankrupt, like Woking or Croydon.

This administration is fully committed to transparency and scrutiny for all key decisions as Otterpool Park moves into its delivery phase. We will ensure that Members are able to take fully informed decisions and work proactively with Otterpool Park LLP, partners and stakeholders to deliver a high-quality new garden village of which we can all be proud.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can I ask that this be done at pace, and there is not delay after delay which will increase costs and make it unaffordable?

ANSWER:

I can state that half of every day that I've spent as Leader has been involving discussions on Otterpool Park. There are multiple decisions to be made. There are areas that need to be accelerated and where actions need to be taken, and I will do my utmost to move these things forward as quickly as I can.

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

Will the council work with me to address the eyesore which is the former Sands Motel on A259 in St Marys Bay, including potential options for

enforcement and/or compulsory purchase; as well as other any other action needed to bring the land back into use for the benefit of the whole community, visitors to the Marsh and to improve its visual impact?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Cooper for your question. I have huge sympathy for local residents who rightly want the site finished and adding value to the St Mary's Bay area. The situation at the site of the former Sands Motel is very unfortunate and I am happy to further explore with officers what options are open to the council. Having had initial discussions with officers it is however clear that the issues involved are complex and need careful thought. I will provide an update for you as soon as possible, in consultation with you, and following further consideration by officers.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

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