

Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Councils' Joint Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Folkestone
Date	Thursday, 19 September 2019
Present	Councillors Graham Allison, Emily Arnold-Newing, Laszlo Dudas, Frank Hobbs, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Christopher Mason, Terence Mullard, Martin Sweeney and Paul Thomas
Apologies for Absence	Councillor Neil Matthews
Officers Present:	Kate Clark (Committee Services Officer), Amandeep Khroud (Assistant Director) and Andrew Hatcher (Revenues and Benefits Strategic Manager)
Others Present:	

7. **Appointment of chairman**

Councillor Frank Hobbs was appointed Chairman for the meeting.

8. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

9. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting dated 18 July 2019 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chairman.

10. **Council Tax**

Mr Andrew Hatcher, Revenues and Benefits Strategic Manager, gave a short briefing on the range of discounts and benefits relating to council tax. He also provided some information on empty home exemptions.

He explained that discounts, benefit reductions and exemptions are reflected in the annual council tax base calculation for budget setting purposes.

Calculations for the district are based on Band D for council tax as this is considered a national average. He advised that information regarding council tax calculations are on the district's website.

Turning to Empty Home exemptions members were advised of the following:

- Empty and unfurnished properties are chargeable for council tax purposes.
- In addition to this, if a property is empty and unfurnished for two years or more a premium would be levied at 50%. From April 2019 this has now changed to 100%.
- There are exemptions to this charge, for example, if a resident moves to a care home or if an annex of the property is occupied.
- These charges are an incentive to ensure owners occupy or rent their properties and there are various grants available to help bring properties back into use.

Mr Hatcher went on to say that discounts and exemptions are incorporated into the budget setting, negating any perceived shortfall. The Single Occupancy Discount is the most prominent discount.

Council tax arrears are chased and summons issued accordingly.

11. **Councillors' Code of Conduct**

Mrs Amandeep Khroud, Assistant Director and Monitoring Officer, gave a presentation of the Code of Conduct. She expressly relayed to members, that discussions on individual cases will not be part of this meeting and if any members had personal concerns, they were welcome to contact her directly after the meeting.

The presentation is attached to these minutes.

Members raised the following points:

- The process in raising a complaint. The initial step would be to complete a complaint form if the complaint cannot be dealt within the Town or Parish Council. This complaint form is then sent to the Monitoring Officer who will ask for further information if needed. An investigation officer will then be appointed to produce a report and refer back to the MO.
- Training in all aspects of the Code of Conduct for town and parish councillors. An external trainer would be best placed to provide this and Mrs Khroud will forward details of prospective trainers.
- LGA Report 2019 provides an update of the Code of Conduct for Town and Parish Councils which could form part of the training.

12. Joint Transportation Board Membership and voting rights

The Parish/Town representative for the Folkestone and Hythe Joint Transportation Board does not have any voting rights and is unable to add items to the agenda unless through another member. This is reflected in the current agreement with Kent County Council.

Mrs Khroud advised members that a revised version of the agreement has been produced, she will seek confirmation from the Leader, which contains the following:

- Town/Parish Council representatives to have rights to vote and add items to the agenda.
- No less than one voting member and no more than three voting members to sit on the Joint Transportation Board.

On a final note, the Chairman reminded members that the Green Infrastructure survey sent to Town and Parish Councils needs to be completed and returned to the District Council.