

Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Councils' Joint Committee

Held at:	Remote Meeting
Date	Thursday, 14 January 2021
Present	Councillors Graham Allison, Emily Arnold-Newing, Laszlo Dudas, Frank Hobbs, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Neil Matthews, Terence Mullard and Paul Thomas
Apologies for Absence	None
Officers Present:	Andy Blaszkowicz (Director of Housing and Operations), Kate Clark (Case Officer - Committee Services), Alastair Clifford (Operations Lead Specialist), Holly Godwin (Case Officer), Cheryl Ireland (Chief Financial Services Officer), Dean Pratt, Charlotte Spendley (Director of Corporate Services) and Steve Weakley (Systems Development & Projects Senior Specialist)
Others Present:	Leigh Poppy (Census Engagement Manager)

12. **Appointment of chairman**

Proposed by Councillor Mrs Jenny Hollingsbee
Seconded by Councillor Paul Thomas

RESOLVED:
That Councillor Frank Hobbs is appointed chairman for the meeting.

Agreed by all members.

13. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

14. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2020 were submitted and approved.

15. **Census in March 2021**

A presentation was provided to members from the Census Engagement Manager for South East Kent.

Points noted:

- Census start date – 21 March 2021.
- Census is carried out every 10 years.
- Accuracy is based on maximum amount of residents taking part.
- Town and Parish Councils asked to help raise awareness of the Census.
- Local Census Engagement staff to be on hand to help residents.
- Paper questionnaires to be available.
- Closing date is 4 May 2021.

Mr Poppy drew members' attention to the Census timeline which is contained within the attached presentation. He also confirmed that contact had been made with the district's three Community Hubs as they are keen to help.

16. **Brexit Transition Update**

The Operations Lead Specialist provided a presentation to members pointing out the various lorry holding sites. Members were advised that Covid 19 testing is mainly carried out at Sevington, however, lorry drivers were encouraged to arrange a Covid 19 test prior to coming into the county. There are 31 Department for Transport (DfT) testing sites outside of Kent and if lorry drivers utilised these it would put less pressure on local services.

Illegally parked lorries can be reported to Kent County Council online or councillors can report problems via the District Council.

Councillor Paul Thomas asked about littering, street cleansing and waste disruption due to the vast number of lorries in the area. The Specialist advised these problems had been mainly in the Dover area, however an update will be provided to this committee.

Although a member asked about actions taken in France to alleviate any issues caused by Brexit, it was pointed out that this is not an area that can be effectively discussed at this meeting.

Turning to the lorry stacking that occurred prior to 1 January 2021, the committee noted that some members of the public had been providing food to the drivers. The Specialist advised that welfare of the drivers falls to Kent County Council and DfT, but he pointed out that drivers are expected to be self-sufficient for 48 hours.

Armed Forces support had been requested, however, it is not an easy task to provide food and facilities to 5000 plus drivers. Lessons had been learnt, but it was noted that some media attention had been unfair.

The presentation for this item and the Covid 19 Vaccination update item is attached to these minutes.

17. **Covid-19 Vaccination Programme**

A presentation was given by the Operations Lead Specialist, who outlined the various sites within the district to be used for administering the Covid 19 vaccination. Members were advised that the Civic Centre Car Park will be a main site, hopefully delivering 400 vaccinations per day. Another proposed site is Folca in Folkestone Town Centre and discussions are underway for this site.

Lydd Airport will be the main vaccination site for the Romney Marsh and the intention is that Pfizer vaccinations will start shortly. Councillor Paul Thomas pointed out that volunteers are needed for meeting and greeting residents and providing transportation to the site. He advised that a call had been made to various organisations to help.

It was noted that there are smaller vaccination sites in the district which are mainly based at larger chemists and surgeries. For all vaccinations an invite is made to each resident based on priority and age and it may be that some residents will have to travel to their allotted vaccination site, this is based on the type of vaccine used, its shelf life and storage.

Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee kindly said that officers had worked tirelessly to help develop all vaccination sites within the district.

18. **'My Account' presentation and update**

'My Account' is the Council's personalised system for residents to give quick and easy access to services. A presentation was given to members which included updates and enhancements to this service.

The Systems Development & Projects Senior Specialist explained the improvements and enhancements to the My Account service and was happy to report that approximately 7050 residents have signed up to the service since its inception.

User updates have been made to Council Tax services, Housing Benefit services and Election information specific to wards with improved and intuitive connections to the Council website.

Prefilled forms are available for ease when making a request or reporting a problem. As an example, members were advised that 50% of waste enquiry transactions are carried out using the online forms.

Customer Services play an important role in providing the Business Support team with feedback from residents which means improvements can be made.

Customer Services can also help residents create an account, keeping in mind security and data protection.

A further social media campaign is to be launched which will coincide with the Council Tax Annual Billing. Posted bills will include a flyer promoting the My Account service. It is expected that the number of My Account registrations will be high in March and April of this year.

The Senior Specialist advised the next area to be launched will be Regulatory Services, eg Environmental enforcement; Food and Hygiene; and Licensing.

Members thanked the Senior Specialist for the presentation and were impressed with the customer intuitive system.

19. **Budget Strategy 2021/22**

Report FH/20/01 summarised the overall Budget Strategy for 2021/22. The report outlined the proposals being consulted upon.

The Chief Financial Services Officer advised members that the report shows a deficit of £3.5mn which is now reduced to £1.6mn due to growth and savings and a review of Fees and Charges and that the budget assumes a 2% increase in Council Tax.

Members asked about the Business Rates Grants. It was noted that this Council has been the most successful in processing and paying of grants, which is due to the hard work of officers, especially in the Finance Team.

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief rundown of business grants issued during Lockdown 1, Lockdown 2, Tier 3, Tier 4 and Lockdown 3. It was pointed out that in all cases care is taken with robust checking and speed of payments being paramount.

Members agreed this was a fantastic service in helping to keep businesses in the District moving.