



FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR YEAR: ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21



LEADER'S STATEMENT

Reflecting on the past year through this annual performance report I am so proud of the amazing amount of progress made in 2020/21 - despite the ever-present backdrop of coronavirus.

Our three community hubs are still going strong and have even achieved national recognition this year with a certification of excellence in the iESE Public Sector Transformation awards. This really is testament to the partnership working with local charities, the hard work of council staff and most importantly the fantastic passion and dedication exhibited by all those who have volunteered.

Picking out highlights from the year is always a difficult challenge. This year we've welcomed our housing service back in-house, won yet more green flag awards for our parks and started work on the Princes Parade development in Hythe that will bring forward state of the art leisure facilities for residents.

Like all authorities, the financial pressures of coronavirus have been hard to mitigate and that's why I am delighted that we once again have balanced our finances meaning that we can continue to deliver our vital frontline services.

It's particularly important for us to invest in the long-term future of the district and that's why I am delighted that we have worked to produce our new corporate plan **Creating Tomorrow Together**. Over nine years this long-term plan will



focus our efforts across four service ambitions – positive community leadership, quality homes and infrastructure, a thriving environment and a vibrant economy. Seven guiding principles will guide our actions as we work towards these ambitions. You can find out more about Creating Tomorrow Together at folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/creatingtomorrowtogether

Finally in 2021 we have been proud to provide our Folca building to be used by the NHS as a large vaccination centre. I am – as I know that many of our staff also are – so proud to be part of the community fight against this pandemic.

2020/21 has been a year of many challenges but also one of hope and we look towards the future with optimism.

Cllr David Monk – Leader of the council



YOUR CABINET MEMBERS



Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee

Deputy Leader and
Cabinet Member for
Communities



Cllr Stuart Peall

Cabinet member for
Enforcement, Regulatory
Services, Waste & Building
Control



Cllr David Godfrey

Cabinet Member for
Housing, Transport &
Special Projects



Cllr David Monk
Leader of the
Council



Cllr Lesley Whybrow

Cabinet Member for the
Environment



Cllr John Collier

Cabinet Member for
Property Management &
Grounds Maintenance



Cllr David Wimble

Cabinet Member for the
District Economy



Cllr Tim Prater

Cabinet Member for
Revenues, Benefits,
Anti-Fraud and
Corruption



Cllr Ray Field

Cabinet Member for
Digital Transformation



YOUR DISTRICT – AN OVERVIEW

Our district is situated on Kent's south east coast and covers an area of 140 square miles. It is a place of variety and contrast with a landscape characterised by rolling chalk downland, wooded valleys, wild marshes, and a 26-mile coastline. The district has a population of approximately 113,000 of which 57.5% (32,800) of female residents and 59.1% (33,000) of males are of working age.

Our principal town, Folkestone, is home to just under half the district's population. It is also the area's commercial hub, particularly for creative and digital media - one of the UK's fastest-growing sectors. The Creative Quarter in Folkestone's Old Town is home to a thriving collection of artists' studios and creative businesses and offers artists, retailers and business people the chance to become part of this lively and ever-growing community.

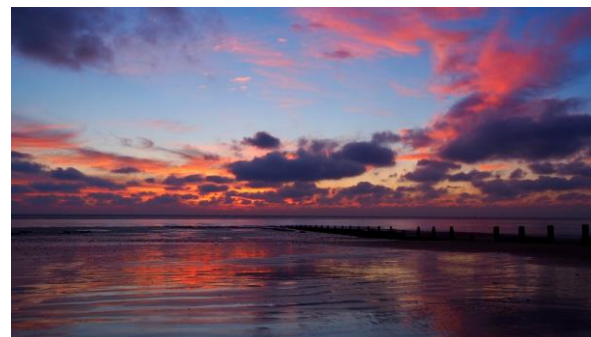
As well as its strong creative focus, the district attracts a variety of innovative small and medium size businesses (SMEs) and is home to strong brand names including Saga, Eurotunnel, Holiday Extras, the Aspinall Foundation and Church & Dwight.

The historic town of Hythe is the district's second centre of population and one of two ancient Cinque Ports in the district. Its central feature is the Royal Military Canal, built for defence against invasion in the Napoleonic wars with France. To the west are the wide open spaces of Romney Marsh, home to New Romney, our second Cinque Port; Lydd, a member of the Confederation of Cinque Ports as a 'limb' of New Romney, and a

number of smaller coastal communities. Contrasting with the wild expanse of marshes are the North Downs, a ridge of chalk hills that stretch from Dover to Farnham. The Downs are home to pretty villages, including Elham, Lyminge and Postling, hidden valleys and thriving vineyards.

Although the district is rural and coastal in character, it is very well connected. The M20 offers easy access to London and other major motorway networks, London is under an hour away via High Speed 1 (HS1) from Folkestone and we have unrivalled access to mainland Europe via the Channel Tunnel.

We think our district is a great place to live, work and visit. It's where the past has made its mark and where a bright new future is unfolding. As the local authority for the district, we have a key role to play in shaping that future.





YOUR COUNCIL – AN OVERVIEW

There is a three tier local Council system in Kent made up of the county council, 12 district and borough councils, parish and neighbourhood councils, alongside Medway Council operating as a unitary. There are 13 wards in the district currently represented by 30 elected councillors.

Folkestone & Hythe District Council is responsible for the delivery of many different public services. Some of our key priorities include planning for a successful local economy with a diverse range of employment opportunities, delivering excellent value and high performance in service delivery, and working together to support the life of our communities. Services provided include managing development through making decisions on planning applications, household waste collection and recycling, street cleaning, car parks and on-street parking, environmental health, housing and homelessness, managing local parks and open spaces and supporting local culture and leisure activities and facilities.

The Council has won a number of awards during 2020/21 including:



iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards

Awarded a 'Certificate of Excellence' for our swift set up of District Wide Community Hubs in response to the coronavirus pandemic.



Best Companies

Awarded a 2-star 'Outstanding' accreditation for employee engagement in Best Companies survey



Customer Service Excellence

Awarded a further 3 compliance pluses by independent assessment for commitment to customer service.

MORE HOMES

We said we would:

- Deliver homes that meet the needs of our changing population
- Accelerate the supply of housing
- Prevent homelessness through early intervention
- Create a new Garden Town at Otterpool Park
- Improve private sector housing conditions
- Bring empty homes back into use





MORE HOMES

- Over 200 private sector homes have been improved across the district as a result of interventions by our Private Sector Housing team. The team has also successfully prosecuted a local landlord during the year who has failed to properly maintain her properties in the district.
- Over 50 long-term empty homes have been returned to use in the district following intervention by the council.
- Our Housing Options team has worked with local partners to assist 35 people with a history of rough sleeping to access support and long-term accommodation.
- 17 homes previously sold under the Right to Buy scheme have been bought back by our Housing Strategy team so that they can be made available for rent by people on the housing waiting list. In addition, the team has also managed to complete the purchase of two further homes that will be made available for shared ownership purchase
- A new Homelessness Prevention Strategy (2020-25) has been developed and implemented by the Housing Strategy team that focuses on ending rough sleeping, providing early intervention, prevention and support as well as ensuring a good supply of affordable accommodation. The strategy aims to do this by adopting a 'housing first approach' by providing support for those who have been homeless with the aim of creating a stable home and enabling people to rebuild their lives as well as exploring the potential of forming a social enterprise scheme to providing training and employment opportunities. More broadly, the strategy outlines the council's commitment to building 1,000 new homes for rent and shared ownership between 2025 and 2035.





MORE HOMES

- This year Cabinet took a further step towards delivering a new garden town by approving the operational structure and funding of the Otterpool Park Limited Liability Partnership (LLP). The LLP, which is fully owned by the Council will take the lead on driving forward proposals for Otterpool Park and be responsible for:
 - Leading and coordinating development activity
 - Leading and coordinating the delivery of infrastructure works
 - Becoming the applicant for the existing planning application and any future submissions
 - Facilitating partnerships, to bring forward housing and employment opportunities
 - Holding and managing residential, commercial, agricultural, and/or industrial land
 - Commissioning professional services
 - Managing new community infrastructure
- The Council successfully adopted the Places and Policies Local Plan in September 2020, following several years of preparation and consultation undertaken by the Planning Policy Team as well as an independent examination by a planning Inspector. The Local Plan allocates a number of sites throughout the district for housing, employment and other types of development. It also contains general policies, designed to protect the natural and historic environment, achieve the best design and more sustainable development.
- Despite the lockdown and restrictions on meetings, the Planning Policy team successfully conducted several weeks of virtual public hearing sessions for the examination of the **Core Strategy Review** between December 2020 and January 2021. Facilities were put in place so that members of the public and interest groups could contribute remotely and put their points on the proposals to two independent planning Inspectors.
- Planning permission was granted in November 2020 for the restoration of the Leas Pavilion, including external and internal alterations, to use it for ancillary residential and flexible community uses, with a nine storey apartment block above comprising 91 flats. The pavilion has deteriorated significantly over the years, resulting in the previous owner being served with an Urgent Works Notice. This permission secures a high quality development in a prominent position on The Leas, and the restoration of a much loved building in Folkestone.
- During the year, our Private Sector Housing team oversaw the adoption of a new Private Sector Housing Policy. The policy was developed following consultation with the public over an eight-week period and sets out how the council deals with hazards in the home and how it will approach landlords who fail to comply with the law. The policy is also designed to provide a detailed guide for landlords and tenants and brings together all of the legislation and guidance that has recently been brought into force. The main points of the policy include:
 - An explanation of the new civil penalty policy for non compliance (civil penalties can be used instead of prosecution).
 - Bringing together penalty frameworks for offences relating to electrical safety and smoke and carbon dioxide alarms into one document.
 - Details of the council's approach to dealing with landlords, whereby there is a staged approach to enforcement wherever possible and only using formal action as a last resort.

OUR HOUSING SERVICE – ‘Where Tenants Are At The Heart Of Everything We Do’.

We launched our new housing service on 1st October 2020. Our vision to create:

‘A world class, digitally enabled service that is easy to do business with and where tenants are at the heart of everything we do’.

Since then our housing team have worked incredibly hard, against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic and all the challenges that has presented, to achieve so much together and build a service which we can all be proud of. Over the past six months the service has:

- Built stronger working relationships with colleagues and teams across the council, as well as with external partners such as the Community Navigator Service, the Peabody ‘hoarding’ service, and Rising Sun Domestic Abuse Service/MARAC.
- Improved how we listen to the tenant’s voice by conducting a tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey (STAR) within the first couple of months of the new service with [results that have been published](#) and feedback has informed an action plan.
- Developed tenant and leaseholder engagement activities – working with the Tenant and Leaseholder Board, TPAS (tenant engagement specialists), and consulted with tenants, to create a Tenant Engagement Strategy due for launch this Spring. The team is building relationships with the Tenant and Leaseholder Board and a cohort of tenants who want to be involved at different levels. The team has also set up a regular online coffee mornings for leaseholders and supported those Independent Living Forum members who are digitally able to resume their meetings.
- Introduced a variety of tenant communications, including the establishment of a bi-annual [tenant newsletter](#), and harnessed bulk email and text messaging systems to keep tenants informed. A private Facebook group for tenants and leaseholders is under development.
- Enhanced our tenant service offering – by introducing a cleaning service to seven blocks following resident consultation. Published a tender for a review of the Independent Living service. Produced proposals for a new caretaking service, and a block and estate inspection regime.

- Improved anti-social behaviour reporting process – by addressing 12 serious and long-standing anti-social behaviour cases. A satisfaction survey for tenants to complete after an ASB case has been dealt with is being developed to continually improve the service.
- Agreed a Spring/Summer 2021 stock survey of all council-managed properties – This will help identify where any improvements are needed, including changes to help achieve the council's target to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Achieved the highest rating for gas compliance that can be achieved - 'substantial' - following an East Kent Audit Partnership (EKAP) audit in December 2020"



MORE JOBS

We said we would:

- Support local employers to flourish
- Identify key sites for future employment opportunities
- Encourage appropriate development and promotion of commercial premises
- Support partners to deliver dynamic and diverse high streets
- Explore opportunities to support the nuclear industry
- Enable appropriate infrastructure to enhance connectivity





MORE JOBS

- The Economic Development team have risen to the challenge of administering the coronavirus Local Authority discretionary business grants on behalf of central government through the coronavirus pandemic. Some £1,285,000 of Discretionary Business Grant funding was distributed to 161 businesses over the summer 2020 and since the national lockdown of November 2020, Additional Restrictions Grants have been awarded to 304 businesses with 98% of the £3.9 million funding now allocated.
- In the summer of 2020, we were successfully awarded a combined total of £5.5 million to provide a boost to the Romney Marsh economy. Funding was secured from the East Kent Spatial Development Company and Magnox to deliver a new £2 million business centre on five hectares of council owned land at the Mountfield Road industrial estate in New Romney through a Joint Venture between EKSDC and the council. This will provide co-working space designed to attract new companies to the area. Construction of this Romney Marsh Business Hub is well underway and will be completed by the end of 2021. In addition to this, a further £3.5 million was awarded from the Government's 'Getting Building Fund' to support phase 2 of the development of the Mountfield Road industrial estate which will bring forward the remaining 5 acres of the council-owned land for employment purposes. This funding will deliver the necessary infrastructure to bring forward employment plots for new business which in turn will create 700 new jobs for the area. Work on phase 2 is due to be complete by March 2022.





MORE JOBS

- The Economic Development team have also been instrumental in securing funding from Magnox and Kent County Council (KCC) to jointly fund with the council a new 3 year coordinator's post to support the work of the Romney Marsh Partnership. While this is not a new role, the increased funding allows for the appointment of a more senior officer, who will develop new projects and secure external funding to help further diversify the Romney Marsh economy from its reliance on the nuclear sector and to take forward new economic growth opportunities
- During the year, the refurbishment of 19 Bouverie Place commenced as part of the regeneration of the High Street. The Folkestone Community Works programme managed by the ED team is enabling this long empty property to be brought into use. East Kent Spatial Development Company have used their grant to refurbish the disused four storey block into modern office space and meeting rooms that can flexibly cater for small and medium-sized businesses – as well as co-working and hot desking space for entrepreneurs and start-ups. Once fully occupied the building will support in the region of 24 enterprises employing potentially 60 people. The offices range from 20-43sqm and are being offered on a fully-serviced basis with easy-in, easy-out terms.

Folkestone Community Works – Supporting Local Business

The Little Greek Bus

The Little Greek Bus was dreamt up by Hannah O'Toole when well-known double-decker sister, The Big Greek Bus situated on the Folkestone Harbour Arm had to keep declining invites to cater for events and food festivals. Hannah contacted the Council for support, and combining her marketing and events industry experience in the process.

The venture got off the ground thanks to a £8,200 grant from Folkestone Community Works to acquire a suitable vehicle to house an operational kitchen. While 2020 has curtailed the prospect of The Little Greek Bus clocking up some serious miles, Hannah has been trialling the business at the Folkestone Harbour Screen and as a click-and-collect service.

Folkelore

A cocktail bar called Folkelore opened its doors in The Old High Street late 2020 thanks to the support of Folkestone Community Works. A grant of £3,650 match-funded by Mr Boyd has been used to purchase equipment including a coffee machine and bar stations.

Mr Boyd, who has been in the cocktail industry for the best part of two decades, is also hoping to be able to offer six-month apprenticeships to local young people in the future. The business has had to adapt during the coronavirus pandemic by launching a takeaway and delivery service until customers can be welcomed properly through the door.

When restrictions ease, the focus will be on creating a "welcoming hub" for people to chat with friends, grab a quick coffee or sit down and work on the laptop during the day. Meanwhile the evenings will orientate around hosting events such as open mic nights, community groups, and workshops.

APPEARANCE MATTERS

We said we would:

- Keep the district clean and tackle environmental issues
- Maintain and improve natural and historic assets
- Maintain a high quality environment through active enforcement
- Work with partners to boost the appearance of the district
- Prepare a new recycling, waste and street cleansing contract for the district
- Provide clean and well maintained public spaces
- Protect and manage the coastal sites in an environmentally sustainable way





APPEARANCE MATTERS

- The Royal Military Canal in Hythe and Folkestone's Lower Leas Coastal Park and Radnor Park all maintained by our excellent Grounds Maintenance team have successfully retained their internationally recognised Green Flag status this year. The award is given to green spaces which boast the highest possible environmental standards, are beautifully maintained and have excellent visitor facilities.
- The council has successfully renovated and replaced beach huts on the promenade below the Lower Leas Coast Park. 35 of the existing beach huts have been given a facelift, whilst 44 classed as in poor condition have now been removed and 80 new wooden chalets successfully installed. The Council partnered with Creative Folkestone that saw celebrated artist Rana Begum commission a striking design scheme for the new chalets using 118 different paint colours. The project was successfully overseen by the council's Engineering & Buildings team in preparation for the huts to become an exhibit as part of the Folkestone Triennial being hosted between July-November 2021.
- As part of the council's commitment to reducing its carbon emissions by 2030, the Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group worked with experts to develop a 'Carbon Action Plan' that was unanimously adopted by Cabinet in February 2021. The plan focuses on six key areas - energy; behaviour change; transport; water; contracts and biodiversity/green space.





APPEARANCE MATTERS

- £25,000 has been invested in improving Radnor Park in Folkestone, Improvements include the installation of football goalposts, a marked-out 400m running track, two picnic tables by the boating pond, community notice boards and an extra bin. The paths in part of the park have also been resurfaced, while the council's grounds maintenance team have planted an extra 20 trees in Radnor Park as part of the authority's climate change commitments.
- In November 2020, the council successfully secured funding of £2million from the Environment Agency to ensure continuing beach management works between Hythe and Folkestone for the next five years. The funding will ensure the recycling and regrading of shingle beaches between Fisherman's Beach and Folkestone Harbour that will protect up to 3,000 homes along the 7km stretch of coastline from flooding.
- A new joint waste and street cleansing contract between Folkestone & Hythe and Dover was successfully negotiated and re-awarded to current operator Veolia following the conclusion of the tendering process. The new contract that commenced in January 2021 will introduce a number of new initiatives to help both district councils achieve their objectives of being carbon net zero by 2030, including a new green fleet of vehicles and electric sweepers, and redesigned collection routes to minimise travel times and the environmental impact of the service.
- The Area Officer team over the past year have carried out over 6,000 SOD its (See it, Own It, Do it) interventions that have to ensure the district has remained a clean and attractive place for local residents and visitors. In addition, the team immediately provided support to the community hubs in response to first coronavirus lockdown by helping to organise and distribute food and medicine to the most vulnerable communities across the district.
- In the wake of community litter picking events being directly impacted by the pandemic, the Area Officers have overseen the distribution of over 100 sets of litter picking equipment to local volunteers to enable them to spend their exercise time helping to keep the district clean.
- The Environmental Protection Team have worked hard throughout the past year to maintain a visible presence around the District to keep the residents and staff protected from Coronavirus by ensuring that anyone breaching the rules was approached using the "4 Es" – Engage, Educate, Encourage to stop and Enforce". The team have helped:
 - Manage large numbers of visitors who came to enjoy the weather and the district's beaches.
 - Deal with incidents of illegal gatherings, notably on Greatstone beach by issuing Community Protection Warning Notices (CPWs) and working with the police to ensure the party was stopped.
 - Checking that local businesses across the district were coronavirus compliant and only open when allowed to do so
 - Visiting supermarkets across the district to help with coronavirus compliance of mask wearing.
 - Support the work of Community Hubs
- In addition to supporting coronavirus rules, Environmental Enforcement Officers have continued to undertake targeted patrols in hotspot areas and look at intelligence led information to tackle environmental offences that have taken place across the district and as result have issued a total of 344 fixed penalty notices for offences including, fly tipping, dropping litter/cigarette butts, letting dogs off leads in designated areas, dog fouling and smoking in unauthorised vehicles.

HEALTH MATTERS

We said we would:

- Promote healthy lifestyles within our communities
- Reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour
- Support the South Kent Coast Health & Wellbeing Board and Local Children's Partnership Group
- Ensure access to high quality open space
- Provide a new district leisure facility
- Ensure the best use of our community assets to support community and voluntary sector organisations
- Help reduce health inequalities through our services and partnership working





HEALTH MATTERS

- Following the swift establishment and funding of three community hubs across the district with local partners in response to the Coronavirus pandemic at the end of March 2020, the hub model has continued to provide a range of essential services needed to ensure the health and wellbeing of residents, particularly those most vulnerable. In July 2020, the council committed to an additional £35,000 of funding to support the hub model in 2020/21. Over the past year, the three hubs based at (a) Folkestone (3 Hills Sports Centre); (b) Hythe (Age UK); and in (c) Romney Marsh (Day Centre) with the support of over 600 volunteers have:
 - Responded to over 65,000 calls from residents,
 - Undertaken over 25,000 GP welfare calls,
 - Delivered over 51,000 hot meals,
 - Delivered 6,300 prescription requests
 - Actioned over 9,200 shopping requests.

The community hubs have developed a depth of community spirit and cohesion across the district during the past year as well as highlighted the strength of partnership and collaboration between the council and volunteer/charitable organisations to deliver for local communities. The collaborative effort of the hubs has been positively recognised as an initiative of national importance with the Council receiving an iESE certificate of excellence in March 2021.

- A total of seven closure orders were obtained by our Community Safety Unit on properties within the district that were deemed to be a nuisance to members of the public or had the potential for disorder.





HEALTH MATTERS

- The Council made available the Civic Centre to support the NHS rollout out of the coronavirus vaccination and has worked closely with the Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust to successfully establish the FOLCA building (Former Debenhams store) within Folkestone Town Centre as one of the first large-scale coronavirus vaccination centres in Kent that has ensured thousands of people per week are vaccinated.
- A new Play Area Strategy has been adopted during the year setting out how the district's play areas will be managed, maintained and enhanced over the next 10 years. As part of the strategy, investment will be prioritised in nine play areas which are nearest to the district's largest numbers of children and young people. In addition the Council will work in partnership with town and parish councils, community groups and housing trusts to establish a network of strategically important play areas ensuring that the majority of the district's residents live within a 15-minute walk of them.
- The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was awarded over £31,000 of funding towards local projects and services to help tackle anti-social behaviour and crime and address issues such as Domestic Abuse and exploitation. A total of 13 projects were funded between April 2020 – March 2021 with the continuation of services including, the One Stop Shop, Aspire homelessness outreach and Urban Pastors. The CSP were also successful in obtaining further funding for Rapid Deployment CCTV, Knife Wands, Emergency Trauma Packs and Knife Bins which are to be installed in the district in May 2021 and will support with us to take forward more work within the district on violence reduction.
- A total of 154 individual ward grants totalling over £89,000 were awarded during the year to benefit local charities and community groups across the district including the Academy FM, East Cliff Community Organisation, Leas Lift, Hythe Environmental Group and Romney Marsh Day Centre.
- The Council agreed to fund a new scholarship that is open to prospective students from the Folkestone & Hythe district who have a confirmed place at Kent and Medway Medical School (KMMS). The scholarship will cover living costs of £5,000 per year for a student from the district for the full five years of the Bachelor of Surgery, Bachelor of Medicine course at KMMS. This will enable future residents to become doctors and so provide vital support to the health sector for years to come.
- The Council appointed BAM Construction to deliver a new leisure centre, promenade and infrastructure works to facilitate this, as well as new homes, at Princes Parade in Hythe. In March 2021, exploratory site investigations began to prepare the area for leisure facilities and accessible open spaces with construction due to begin in the first quarter of 2022.
- The Council has a statutory safeguarding duty to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults. During 2020/21 many vulnerable adults in particular were supported with problems such as suicidal thoughts, abuse and neglect impacting negatively on their mental and physical health and wellbeing. Our trained designated officers for safeguarding dealt with almost 60 cases with some requiring specialist social services or police intervention.
- During the winter of 2020, we received funding to help support vulnerable people to stay warm and fed during the cold periods and during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. A host of agencies including Food banks, Community Hubs and Early Help teams helped in distributing food, heaters, warm clothing and other help. This support has kept people safe and well through very difficult times for them. In total the scheme up to the end of March 2021 has supported: 1,314: Vulnerable families with children and 1,002: Vulnerable families without children.

ACHIEVING STABILITY

We said we would:

- Ensure strong financial discipline
- Explore alternative income streams including commercial opportunities
- Develop an investment strategy for the longer term benefit of the district
- Explore opportunities including working collaboratively to achieve efficiencies, reduce costs and improve resilience
- Optimise the financial benefit from major developments in the shorter and medium term
- Identify 'Invest to Save' opportunities





ACHIEVING STABILITY

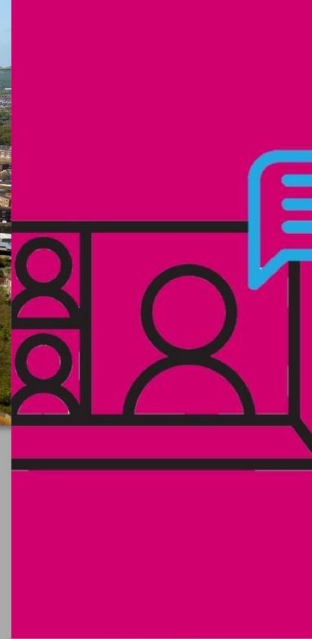
- Over £36 million in business grants was administered to 2,171 local businesses across the district since March 2020 at speed which has no doubt helped some of them survive the pandemic.
- The council was the first local authority in Kent to successfully have its 2019/20 Statement of Accounts signed off by external audit after a difficult and extended audit period.
- Despite the financial challenges presented by the coronavirus Pandemic, the Council approved a balanced budget for the 2021/22 year whilst supporting the most vulnerable during the pandemic and protecting frontline services.
- Following the transition of the Housing Service back to the council from East Kent Housing in October 2020, the management of Housing Rents has been successfully integrated into the Corporate Debt team with minimal disruption to service and despite most recovery action being on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, we have managed to reduce housing rent arrears by 25% that equates to approximately £100k since the service transition took place.
- The council's insurance contract was successfully retendered for the next 5 years achieving a saving on the existing premium of £350,000 thanks to effective risk management undertaken.
- Excellent treasury management for the council has been maintained throughout the year by our finance team resulting in an average return of around 2% interest this year when interest rates have been at an all time low, with the Bank of England base rate at just 0.1%.
- The council has worked closely with its corporate property tenants to encourage continued rent payments with few disruptions and limited arrears leading to maintenance of the Council's corporate property income. Furthermore the council has secured further income in excess of budget from miscellaneous transactions throughout the year.
- Over £121,000 has been generated by the Organisational Development team through apprenticeship and commercial work undertaken with neighbouring East Kent Authorities (Canterbury, Dover and Thanet)
- £250,000 of funding has been allocated, to undertake development and feasibility works for the proposed establishment of a new customer access point in Folkestone town centre and the relocation of the Civic Centre. The long-term proposal to move out of the Civic Centre is part of the council's drive to reduce its carbon footprint and has been accelerated by the successful way in which staff have delivered services whilst working from home during the coronavirus pandemic.

DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

We said we would:

- Focus on the customer in delivering excellence
- Create a 'digital by default' approach to services
- Keep all councillors, staff and customers informed
- Retain and recruit staff to deliver new ways of working and the challenges ahead
- Motivate and enable staff to maintain and enhance performance
- Sustain and develop a flexible and responsive workforce
- Recognise and reward the value of staff

It's so good to see you



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



How can I report a fly-tipping incident out-of-hours?

MyReports
MyAccount

folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccountinfo



WE'RE WITH YOU!

#SUPPORTLOCAL



Find out which local businesses are offering a food & drink delivery service near you.

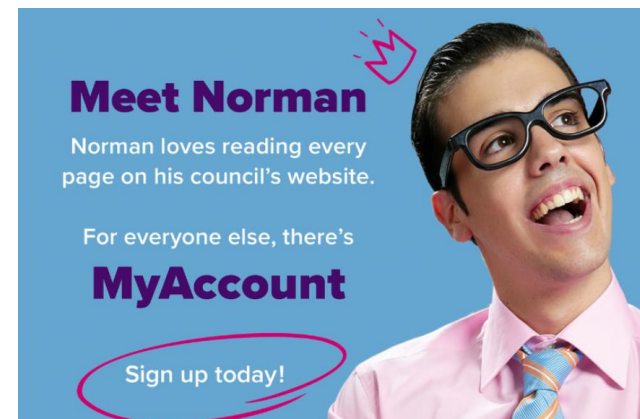
#PurplePages

folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/supportlocal/purplepag



DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

- Following the completion of a virtual surveillance visit, the Council retained its Customer Service Accreditation with 12 compliance plusses and was awarded a further 3 for the following:
 - Work undertaken by the Welfare Team to make sure the Council fully understands the needs and expectations of all customers during the Covid crisis.
 - Adaptation of policies and procedures (and the development of new ones where needed) to make sure customer needs are properly identified and met where possible.
 - The efforts made to make sure that all customers know how to access services during lockdown and throughout the ongoing challenges of Covid
- In March 2021 we undertook the full Best Companies survey with 75% of staff taking part and have been formally accredited as a 2 star '**outstanding**' organisation to work for.
- The Council launched its 'My Account' service that lets users see council information relevant to them all in one place 24/7 including bin collections, benefits and council tax - as well as making payments and tracking the progress of reports made to officers. In space of seven months from its launch in August 2020, the service has been positively received with a total of 11,500 people having signed up.
- Our web chat service continues to be a popular service as ever with customers, achieving a fantastic 93.26% for customer satisfaction this year.





DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

- The 2020/21 results for the Council's gender pay gap shows the average gap between male and female employees has continued to fall. We achieved a mean average difference of 0.06%, which equates to a difference of just 1p an hour. Meanwhile the median calculations conclude that women earned, on average, nearly 9% more than men. The difference between the two sets of data is caused by the make-up of council staff, the fact it employs more women than men, and the distribution of males and females across the pay spectrum.
- In February 2020, the Revenues and Benefits team recruited a new dedicated training officer recognising the need to continually invest in officers' training and development not only within the Revenues and Benefits team but also across wider services including customer services, corporate debt and the new housing service. Training to become a Revenue and Benefits Officer takes 3-6 months minimum when in an office environment surrounded by colleagues who can support immediately. Two new officers with no prior experience joined the team in April 2020 at the beginning of the first lockdown and were successfully trained through a majority of virtual sessions hosted over Zoom and Skype as well as some social distanced sessions held within the Civic Centre in the summer once the lockdown restrictions eased. The two new members of the team are now integrated into the wider team following their initial training.
- In April 2020, the council established a new Welfare Team that been instrumental in awarding hardship payments for people struggling to pay their council tax. The team of four, in addition to helping people with their financial position, they have signposted customers to numerous external organisations so they can get help and support for their mental health, financial stability and general wellbeing. The team are now a firm fixture at the quarterly Volunteer Sector Group they have gone from strength to strength and been recognised out in the community for the work they are doing.
- The Committee Services team successfully established and undertook training with members on the Zoom meeting platform to ensure all committee meetings could resume virtually in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and allow councillors to continue representing their electorate and make important decisions in public.
- As result of council meetings moving to virtual hosting due to Coronavirus restrictions a new Leader's Q&A session was introduced in June 2020. The initial meeting was broadcast live on the council's dedicated YouTube channel. Public meetings have continued to take place on a bi-monthly basis throughout the year enabling both the members of the public and councillors to quiz the Leader on matters that may be of concern within an open forum.
- The communications team have worked hard throughout the year to help residents and businesses by amplifying national safety messaging and promoting local support:
 - Work was undertaken to refresh safety signage throughout the district and a video was created with local businesses to encourage safe shopping; the video on re-opening high streets safely was promoted through both the council's corporate and Folkestone & Hythe place brand channels and received over 27,000 views.
 - In addition to amplifying regional and national mental health support through the Council's own media channels we also produced an article through the Folkestone & Hythe Place brand about tips for a healthy mind and body during lockdown and did an A-Z of the district on Instagram to highlight the great things that we have access to in the district.
 - Finally we also realised early on in lockdown that local residents were unsure which food businesses were open, so we set up Purple Pages. This is a free list on our website of local traders that were still doing takeaway or collection so residents can still support local businesses.
- Three members of our staff were recognised for their life-saving skills, having helped members of the public who got into difficulty swimming from beaches in Hythe and Folkestone by bringing them safely back to shore.
- The Council leased 120 beach huts in preparation for the summer, dealing with tenant enquiries and final completions on 23 leases, with over 50% of the leases having been completed so far and keys to the chalets released.



DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

- Over the past year, the OD team have been incredibly flexible in relation to the delivery of qualifications. In early 2020, the team moved to providing training online, shifting platforms of our established qualifications and receiving great feedback from participants. Indeed, the quality of our courses continues to improve despite them being remote: 100% of those completing F&HDC-led apprenticeships over the past year have gained distinctions.
- The Organisational Development Team has delivered a successful apprenticeship programme for FHDC staff and those of other local councils and businesses. The team specialises in delivering management qualifications as well as business administration and has been rated as 'Excellent' by our customers.
- Throughout the pandemic our Organisational Development Team (OD) have doubled efforts to keep staff engaged while working from home and also support them throughout the year by:
 - Carrying out multiple surveys and wellbeing calls
 - Training a pool of mental health first aiders
 - Promoting HR Drop-in sessions
 - Delivering personal resilience sessions
 - Working with the Corporate Leadership Team and managers on how we can manage well in a pandemic and support our staff.
 - Facilitating online social events
 - Sending regular (daily at first and now weekly) email updates to keep everyone informed of news and developments.
 - Celebrating the great work of teams and signposting staff to support and resources.
 - Facilitating bi-monthly online staff briefings and created regular video updates from all directors.
 - Starting a regular podcast recording informal chats with various members of staff to promote a sense of connection and community.

What people have said about the ILM Apprenticeship Programme:

- *"I would not have achieved this result without the support from you and the rest of the OD team throughout the ILM course though, particularly in the lead up to the final assessment, so thank you very much". -Learner from Folkestone & Hythe District Council*
- *"I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to undertake the ILM qualification. The skills I developed have enabled me to become a better manager and to understand my team and how to motivate individuals. There is so much more I could say but the main thing is that this qualification has added value to my professional career and I am ready to take the next step up. The support received was second to none - if you have the opportunity to do this course, take it!" - Learner, Canterbury City Council*
- *"I just wanted to share with you my good news and say thank you again for your excellent teaching. I applied for a senior job in Housing and I was successful....I learnt so much from the course and I was able to demonstrate that in my interview. The ILM course was fantastic and I really appreciate what you have done for me through your excellent teachings and guidance". - Learner, Dover District Council*
- *"A's submission, like all your candidate's this year, their portfolios are of a high standard and contained quality information and evidence. Additionally, I want to reinforce what you and the rest of your colleagues in the learning and development team within Folkestone and Hythe District Council have done in supporting A in providing him with new knowledge, insights, skills, and motivating him to complete his studies." - End-point Assessor, DSW (Apprenticeships)*

CORPORATE PLAN 2021-30 – ‘CREATING TOMORROW TOGETHER’

In February 2020, we published our new Corporate Plan ‘**Creating Tomorrow Together**’, a 34-page document setting out our over-arching principles and service ambitions up until 2030 following approval by councillors.

The plan identifies the main priorities and themes of the council, including the key role we will play in leading the district's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic over the next three years.

The name of our corporate plan was inspired by the excellent relationships and networks which the council already has - and will continue to build on for the benefit of residents. It also alludes to the recovery work already being undertaken.

The plan was subject to public consultation in late 2020 and incorporates the key points raised during the consultation period to ensure it reflects the needs and ambitions of our residents, businesses and key stakeholders across the district.

The plan is focused on four service ambitions which are priority areas of action that relate to the key services that the council plans, delivers and commissions and six guiding principles that guide everything that we do (see summary image).

The adopted service priority actions as part of the plan will be further developed into an action plan, with progress against the plan itself monitored annually, and the plan will be comprehensively reviewed in 2024 to ensure it remains appropriate for the district.

A copy of our new corporate plan can be found here: [Creating Tomorrow Together – Corporate Plan 2021-30](#)



Creating Tomorrow Together: Corporate Plan 2021-30

Service ambition 1: Positive community leadership	Service ambition 2: A thriving environment	Service ambition 3: A vibrant economy	Service ambition 4: Quality homes and infrastructure
Priorities in the next three years	Priorities in the next three years	Priorities in the next three years	Priorities in the next three years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve physical and mental health & wellbeing Safer communities Supporting & empowering our communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure an excellent environment for everyone Grow the circular economy & reduce waste Increase our resilience to climate change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinvigorate the high streets Support a vibrant & diverse business community Help people access jobs & opportunity Grow the skills we need for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve outcomes & support for homeless people Deliver sustainable, affordable housing Deliver a safe, accountable housing service Digital inclusion & connectivity Deliver a sustainable new development at Otterpool Park

In everything we do we will follow these guiding principles:

- Sustainable recovery**
We will do all we can to ensure a strong recovery for the district from the effects of COVID.
- Locally distinctive**
We will protect the special distinctive and diverse nature of our district - working with our key partners to enhance it.
- Greener Folkestone & Hythe**
We will encourage and create a more sustainable district consuming fewer natural resources.
- Transparent, stable, accountable and accessible**
We will be financially sustainable and communicate effectively with our communities in an accessible way.
- Working effectively with partners**
We will engage with partners to understand the vital role they play and work collaboratively with them to ensure the best outcomes for our residents.
- Continuous improvement**
We will embed a culture of continuous improvement, seeking feedback and being innovative and creative to find new ways to deliver services.





Online anytime at www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Register for 'My Account' – The easy way to access Council information

- Pay your council tax and view your previous council tax bills
- Find your bin collection day
- See planning applications within 500m radius of your registered property
- Report missed bins and dog fouling
- View a history of your council tax reductions and housing benefits
- View details of your local councillors.... and more!

To register and to find out more information about 'My Account' please visit:

www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/myaccountinfo

It's clear, simple and fast and is also available on your tablet or mobile.

Website: folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

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