

Council – 30 November 2022

Councillor Questions:

1. From Councillor Gane to Councillor Field, Cabinet Member for Transport and Digital Transformation

The Car Park in Aldridge Road, Cheriton was closed off because of Travellers issues. However the problem now is that Cars, particularly on a Sunday, are causing a headache for local residents as cars are parking all over the place therefore what action is being taken to open the car park such as a width limit?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The car park has been closed due to the previous issues with illegal traveller encampments. There have been no reported issues over the last year since the blocks have been in place. Officers have been in dialogue with Taylor Wimpey (as the freehold ownership of the car park is still with them) and the Community Safety Unit to consider removing the blocks preventing access to the car park so access may resume. Following these conversations it has been established there is a current risk to further encampments in the district due to heightened recent activity. It has been decided to leave the blocks in place and review the situation in 3 months when hopefully Taylor Wimpey will be able to remove the blocks to allow access.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Could you use Tungsten locks, which are more difficult to break, and give a key to the staff so they can open it on Sundays?

ANSWER:

We will consider all options.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

We already use high quality locks where they are required. We have considered whether the car park could be opened for football matches and then locked after the matches have finished.

In practical terms this is very difficult. Unlocking and opening the car park is feasible. The locking part is where problems occur. Not all vehicles will vacate the car park at the same time. Other people may decide to park in the car park, leaving their car there whilst they visit friends in neighbouring properties. We could often be in situations where cars get locked in the car park as the owners cannot be located. Even if we put signs up saying that the car park will be locked at a certain time we will still have situations when cars are still in the car park.

As stated in the original response we will review the situation in three months when hopefully we will be able to open the car park.

2. From Councillor J Martin to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

How were the 40 developers who were invited to bid for the housing land on Prince's Parade selected?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Martin for your question.

The Council appointed experienced agents who undertook a full marketing campaign targeting all those developers and housebuilders who have the capability and local market experience to bring forward a development of this scale. The list was compiled from the agent's extensive database of contacts and known market participants.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

What due diligence was carried out on the 13 companies invited to bid?

ANSWER:

I will find out and provide a written response.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

'All of the companies who bid on the opportunity did so on the basis of the planning permission in place at the time and the requirement to submit reserved matters. Full due diligence is only undertaken when selecting the final party, or parties, during the Heads of Terms process. The following due diligence was therefore undertaken in respect of the proposed disposal:

- *Full legal name of the purchasing entity;*
- *Company incorporation checks, including country and date of incorporation;*
- *Confirmation as to the purpose of the transaction;*
- *Adverse media and news check;*
- *Due diligence on the relationships between all Parties to the transaction;*
- *Due diligence on Source of Funds (SOF) and Source of Wealth (SOW);*
- *Proof of ID on Company Directors and Senior Managing Officials, including bank statements and proof of address in the UK;*
- *Due diligence on UK tax conformity;*
- *Due diligence on Ultimate Beneficial Owners (UBO) and Company Shareholding Structure;*
- *Financial analysis on the Purchaser, including company accounts detailing Turnover, Operating Profit, Current Assets and Work in Progress;*

- *Due diligence on Sanctions and PEPs;*
- *Due diligence on purchaser's CSR;*

3. From Councillor Jim Martin to Councillor Monk, Leader

What are the plans to replace the children's play area on Prince's Parade destroyed by the pre services agreement works carried out by the Council's Contractor?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Martin for your question. The play area to which you refer is still in place and has not been affected by any works by the Council's contractor under the pre-services contract agreement. The play area is still open to the public and being maintained the Council.

There was no supplementary question but a political statement was made.

4. From Councillor Whybrow to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special Projects

Can you please confirm that even though spending on the Princes Parade project has been paused, the badgers and reptiles that have been removed from the site will continue to be monitored by the ecologists?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Whybrow. As you rightly say spending on the project has been paused to allow officers to consider the options. It is proposed that a paper will be brought to Cabinet as soon as possible once the work has been concluded. Until this time no monitoring work will take place. I will ensure that officers consider this as part of the options report.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Does the stop on spending mean that no air quality monitoring is taking place?

ANSWER:

I will look into this and provide a written response after the meeting.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

BAM who were organising and overseeing the air monitoring through a sub-contractor have been directed to stop operations and no longer have a site presence. We are currently directed not to incur any expenditure so no air-monitoring is taking place.

Whilst there are no operations on site, little or no disturbance of material is taking place, that might be airborne. Testing carried out prior to suspension of the works did not detect any reportable levels of adverse air quality.

5. From Councillor Whybrow to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special Projects

If the Princes Parade project were to be stopped, whose responsibility would it be to remove the hoardings?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Whybrow. As per my previous response officers are carrying out a review of the project and will be presenting an options paper to Cabinet as soon as possible. Ultimately if the project was stopped it would be the council's responsibility to remove the hoardings, but only when it was considered safe to do so.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

How much would the removal of hoardings cost?

ANSWER:

I will look into this matter and provide a written response after the meeting.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

Officers have been in contact with the company that supplied and installed the hoarding. If the hoarding is still in good condition (at the point of disposal) it is likely that the company would buy this back from the council at an agreed percentage of the original purchase price. The company who installed the hoarding would then come and remove it and charge us for this operation. The overall cost to the Council including the buy back will to be around £50K however this will depend upon the condition of the hoarding when it is taken down.

6. From Councillor Whybrow to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special Projects

Given that the Princes Parade project is now being re-evaluated, will you now reconsider the possibility of a leisure centre at Martello Lakes before that opportunity expires?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Whybrow. Officers are carrying out a review of the Princes Parade project which will be reported to Cabinet as mentioned in my previous response. This review is focusing solely on the current project and will provide an options appraisal concentrating on financial, environmental and community implications. If members decide to stop the

Princes Parade project they may then decide to instruct officers to look at alternative sites for the provision of new leisure facilities in the district.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

What is the expiry date of the S106 contribution from the Martello lakes development for the leisure centre?

ANSWER:

I will look into this matter and provide a written response after the meeting.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

The Sports Leisure and Community Contribution under the s106 agreement does not expire, it is payable in any event and is indexed linked. It is payable no earlier than the 300th Dwelling and the earlier of the Occupation of the 301st Dwelling or 31 March 2023.

7. From Councillor Shoob to Councillor Field, Cabinet Member for Transport and Digital Transformation

The council is waiving car parking charges on three Saturdays in the run up to Christmas. What consideration, if any, was given to incentivising travel other than by private car?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The district council is offering free parking in council owned car parks and on-street parking bays in the three Saturdays leading up to Christmas, a scheme that is popular with both traders and residents. The district council is not responsible for bus travel schemes. KCC already provides funding to subsidise some bus routes or services. There are a number of discounted day and evening tickets, and free concessionary travel offered by the bus operator, Stagecoach. These are all promoted by Stagecoach on their website and on the buses.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Do we have any evidence that free parking at Christmas has a positive impact on the high street spending?

ANSWER:

I will look into this matter and provide a written response after the meeting.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

We are currently reinvesting in the delivery of footfall data for the town centre which will enable us to directly see the impact this type of intervention has on footfall. In addition, local independents certainly see this as a positive action that supports their businesses. Most recently, one particular business had requested a copy of the leaflet used in our car parks promoting the free parking which they printed directly to share with their customers as well as for other retail businesses to share with their customers.

8. From Councillor Shoob to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special projects

How long do tenants in the private rented sector need to wait for a council inspection to assess mould, damp or other landlord disrepair?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

All complaints about disrepair in the private rented received by the Council are taken extremely seriously by the Council's Private Sector Housing Team. Where possible the team look to work with landlords, agents and tenants to ensure that homes across the district are properly repaired and maintained. Where landlords fail to respond, the Council does not hesitate to take enforcement action against them. In terms of time frames, the Council looks to prioritise the most serious cases. In some cases, we are able to provide immediate advice to tenants so that they are able to address issues directly with their landlords. However, over the period April 2019 to 31 March 2022, 545 private sector homes with identified hazards, were improved in the district through direct intervention work by the Council.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can you confirm what the longest wait is for a surveyor to visit?

ANSWER:

I know that the private sector housing team react quickly to these matters, but I will provide a written response after the meeting.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

All complaints regarding disrepair in the Private Rented Sector are triaged in terms of their level of hazard. All complainants are contacted on receipt of their complaint by the Council. Where necessary, we provide advice to complainants and explain that in the first instance they should advise their landlords about the issue(s) and work with them to get them resolved. In some cases, we may also request further information to enable us to fully assess a complaint in the triage stage. In terms of complaints involving serious issues of disrepair, such as electrical safety, fire safety and excess cold within a property, these will be triaged and given a higher priority and dealt with prior to those reporting less

dangerous hazards. Officers will then visit and fully assess the property, so that all identified hazards within the property are resolved, including issues of damp and mould, which are often linked to excess cold within a property.

In less serious cases of disrepair, which are identified as aesthetic issues, rather than presenting a health risk to occupants, it may take over 6 months for officers to be able to visit a particular property. However, as set out above, we do provide initial advice and information to tenants on how to work to resolve these issues. Waiting times for less serious issues are affected by the number of complaints being made to the Council and the severity of the complaints at any particular time.

9. **From Councillor Meade to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste and Building Control**

I am receiving more and more complaints regarding inconsiderate residents not clearing up after their dogs. Can you please tell me how many staff we have patrolling on this matter and how many fines were handed out in the last year?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question. Please do send me examples of incidents, and we can look at targeting enforcement.

I can confirm that we have 4 Enforcement Officers and 1 Senior Enforcement Officer who patrol the district and act on dog fouling issues.

2 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) were issued for dog fouling in 2022.

Enforcement action can only take place if the officer has witnessed the dog foul and the owner walk away. If the officer has not witnessed this, no FPN can be issued and only educational information can be given.

Whilst the team are unable to document the number of people given educational information to, it is felt that on average 1500 dog owners are engaged with via "pop up events" and during routine and targeted patrols, to ensure as many owners know the rules.

A new dog fouling campaign to highlight awareness of clearing up after dogs is about to be launched with new signage and comms messaging, asking people to report cases to the Council so officers can use the information to do targeted patrols in the most affected areas.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can you suggest some way that residents can use to let you know specific examples, and how we can catch these offenders?

ANSWER:

We are running a campaign, the schools run campaigns and it is an agreed element of owning a dog that waste must be cleared up. In respect of the licensing of dogs, this is a national issue. In respect of communications, the reporting service is fully accessible via MyAccount, the council telephone number, my email address (which no one has used thus far), and 'snail' mail. There is not much more we can do, we are limited to five officers with multiple roles and there is no budget in order to increase the number of officers.

10. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

How many temporary staff are at present employed by FHDC in comparison to salaried/contracted staff?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question. The council currently employs 465 staff amounting to 408.98 full-time equivalent staff.

In addition to this the council currently engages 11 agency workers.

Agency workers may be engaged for a number of reasons, including covering short-term or temporary vacancies, supporting specific schemes, or to provide specific skill sets. There are variations in the amount of agency workers engaged throughout the year. The council is likely to engage more agency workers in the summer to support services that have changing seasonal requirements for example.

When considering the use of agency workers the council always considers the most effective and efficient means of resourcing.

There was no supplementary question.

11. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

When will staff be returning to work at the Civic Centre?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Keen for your question.

Staff can work from the Civic Centre, and many have been doing so for months as we have recovered from Covid restrictions. The council has always supported flexible working and an agile approach where staff can work from any suitable facility; this could be from the Customer Access Point, from the Civic Centre, from one of our depots, or from home or other facilities where it is conducive to do so and appropriate for their particular role. For more information please see the council's People Strategy and Agile Working Framework that were considered by Personnel Committee in June 2021.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Would it be possible for members of the public have a way to contact officers to arrange meetings, as not everything can be dealt with over the phone?

ANSWERS:

I will provide the opening times of our building, when officers are available, to Councillor Keen.

*After the meeting, the following further information was provided:
The Customer Access Point is open between 10am and 4pm on weekdays.*

12. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special Projects

Could we have a breakdown on how much the Princes Parade development has cost the district to date?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Keen for your question. Yes, information will be provided to Cabinet as part of the options report being prepared.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Why is this information being provided to Cabinet?

ANSWER:

The options report is to be considered by Cabinet, what happens to it after that is yet to be decided, but I'm sure you'll get to know the result.

13. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

How has the district council been consulted in relation to Kent police's review of neighbourhood policing?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

Although the Council are aware of the review, we have not given formal response in relation to Kent Police's review of neighbourhood policing. When the Council is provided with details these can be shared (if not restricted). Furthermore the Cabinet Member for communities has submitted a question for the Police & Crime Panel on 6 December asking how the Commissioner is holding the Temporary Chief Constable accountable following his decision to

significantly reduce the number of PCSOs and to explain what impact this is likely to have on his community policing priorities.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Have we responded to the consultation as a stakeholder?

ANSWER:

There is no consultation to respond to.

14. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special Projects

Shepway Citizens Advice Bureau is seeing an increasing number of residents facing rent increases and disrepair in their homes. Others working in the field report that poor landlords are more likely to pay a fine than carry out repairs. We have seen the horrendous death of a two year old who died from prolonged exposure to mould. Against this backdrop what is the council's assessment of the disrepair issues we face in the district, what resources does the council have to inspect and deal with disrepair across all types of housing and what is its action plan for doing so?

ANSWER:

Thank you, Councillor Davison. I am sure that all members will share your concerns about the tragic death of 2 year old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. As I set out in my previous response to Councillor Shoob, I would like to re-assure you that our Private Sector Housing Team take all issues of disrepair, including cases involving damp and mould extremely seriously. Where possible the team look to work with landlords, agents and tenants to ensure that homes across the district are properly repaired and maintained. Where landlords fail to respond, the Council does not hesitate to take enforcement action against bad landlords. Over the period 1st April 2019 to 31 March 2022, 545 private sector homes were improved in the district because of intervention work by the Council. 68 of the homes in this total, were identified as having issues of damp and mould. 7 of the properties in this total were improved following formal enforcement action by the Council. Going forward the team will continue to work with landlords and tenants to improve their homes, but where necessary, we will always use enforcement action where private landlords fail to carry out their responsibilities.

In terms of the council's own housing stock, our Neighbourhood Surveying Team regularly carry out inspections of reported damp and mould to our properties. They work to a check list to ensure nothing is missed and use damp meters to take readings of affected areas. We offer our residents a comfort thermometer to assist in the reduction of condensation. This operates on a colour coded system showing green for ideal, red for too humid and blue for too cold. The team give advice on what is best to clean and how to manage mould growth along with day-to-day advice regarding lids on pans, drying

clothes on radiators, tumble dryers etc as in many cases, condensation can be reduced by simple lifestyle changes.

The Neighbourhood Surveying Team also carry out a follow up inspection, 4 weeks minimum after their initial visit to see if the property has improved and to address any other concerns. If the problem is more severe, a specialist contractor is instructed to carry out a more detailed report and we then act on their recommendations.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Will you commit to publishing the response to the social housing regulator in response to the request for information on damp and mould issues in the housing that we are responsible for?

ANSWER:

I don't think there is any reports that relate to our housing condition that shouldn't be made available, but I'll check on what you are asking.

After the meeting, the following information was provided:

A request was received from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) dated 22nd November 2022 requiring us to provide details on how FHDC deals with damp and mould issues.

Our response of this information will be made via an RSH online survey with a submission date of 19th December 2022. Once submitted we will publish our reply on the website.

15. **From Councillor Davison to Councillor Prater, Cabinet Member for Revenues, Benefits, Anti-Fraud and Corruption Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council (Cllr Prater has given apologies)**

Please can you provide an update on the Household Support Fund?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The second wave of the Household Support Fund concluded on 30 September 2022. FHDC received an allocation of £459,669 to spend and I can confirm that all of that money has been used to support vulnerable residents. The £364,150 that we were required to spend on pensioner households was used to support 867 households. The remaining £94,519 was used to support 646 non-pensioner households. In terms of what the money was spent on, over £320,000 went on energy, £75,000 on food £50,000 on other essentials and £15,000 on temporary staff to make it possible to administer the scheme in the limited time available.

The third wave of the Household Support Fund is now live in the district. The scheme opened on 25 November 2022 and will close on 31 March 2023 or until funds are exhausted; for this wave our allocation is only £207,246. Applications for this limited funding can be made online:

www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/household-support-fund.

The Council is also currently in the process of targeting vulnerable households to offer support to residents.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Are there plans to publicise more widely the re-opening of this round of the fund?

ANSWER:

I can't answer that but I can confirm we do proactively contact those people who most need this assistance.

After the meeting the following additional information was provided:

The scheme is not publicised widely at the moment due to limited funding. Agencies in the district and the hubs have been advised. Once the targeted work and applications that have already been received have been completed we will review what funding remains as we do not want to set expectations for residents that we may not be able to meet.

16. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Field, Cabinet Member for Transport and Digital Transformation

Please can you provide data for response times to emails from residents to the council, including the proportion where no response has been given at all?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Councillor Davison.

We endeavour to respond to all emails from residents as soon as possible. Certain response times are captured as part of our performance indicator reporting but, due to the many different types of enquiries received, we do not capture data corporately for each individual category.

The response times depend on the type of enquiry and the workloads of officers and teams. We aim to provide an acknowledgement of the enquiry within five working days and response times are usually within 10 working days thereafter but responses can take up to 21 days or more when dealing with more complex enquiries.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I'm aware of some people not getting responses at all. What recourse of action can be taken?

ANSWER:

We cannot do anything unless we are advised of these situations.