

Agenda item 9 (Portfolio Holder reports)

1. Report of the Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

I was immensely proud and honoured to be voted in as Leader of the Folkestone and Hythe District Council. Since becoming the Leader, 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 had several meetings with Otterpool Park LLP.

I have also had meetings with residents, partners 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 people employed by FHDC and be asked to present the Recognition Awards for Customer Service. I will be joining Luke Douglas-Home, known as 'The Coastal Runner,' and we will be running from Folkestone to Hythe on World Ocean Day – Thursday 8th June, as Luke continues his run around the UK's coastline.

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

2. Report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

I've been asked to write a 3 paragraph report. Sorry.

Although it's only been 2 weeks since the AGM, as with all Councillors I've attended a wide range of briefings, training sessions and meetings.

As have all Councillors, I've been set online homework with a variety of E-training modules. I've now completed (and passed) Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, GDPR and Environmental Awareness modules. 5 more to do...

Jim, Connor and I are meeting informally weekly to discuss forthcoming issues and the strategic direction of the council.

Wednesday 31st May was the first Cabinet get together and a briefing / training session: much to learn and listen. To reflect importance of the Labour Group as part of our leadership, if not administration, Connor was invited and attended this "executive" session, and will be invited to all subsequent ones too.

I raised a website accessibility issue with table content on mobile devices on our website (on <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/financial-information-charges/council-tax-financial-information-2023-2024>) and that was subsequently fixed for those pages and now being checked across the whole site: thanks to Steve Weakley and the team.

Coming soon: more finance briefings. There is a big job to deal with the last administration's built-in £18m Medium Term Expected Deficit - the elephant in the room that no-one really discussed. We need to build a secure budget for next year that allows us to deliver the services we want, at a Council Tax we can afford. Work is starting, and the Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee will be involved in the briefings and discussions from the start, to ensure both the proposals made, and their scrutiny, are well informed and robust.

I researched and wrote the motion to Full Council to commence the process of moving F&HDC to a committee system by May 2024 which appears on tonight's agenda. Thank you Rochford DC for source material!

If passed tonight, our motion will commit this Council to a Committee system. It will be a tight timetable to deliver on, but we plan to do so. I've agreed with the Monitoring officer that the working group the motion agrees will meet in public and publish agendas and minutes.

I've discussed with the Monitoring Officer the Governance part of my cabinet role, looking at both improved controls and checks currently being put in place to deal with significant weaknesses identified in the last administration.

We also discussed a hopefully helpful procedural change: removing the need to stand to speak at full council meetings (it's already not required at Cabinet and Committees and Working Groups). As an alternative to a constitutional amendment, we agreed that we could action it simply through an announcement from the Chair to the effect the standing to speak is optional at future full council meetings. That will suit the microphones on desks, webcasting, and councillors that find standing hard all at the same time.

It is also an important part of Governance that all Councillors, both District and the Towns and Parishes in our area, have fulfilled their legal requirement to provide a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) form as they are legally required to do so within 28 days of their election.

I asked the Monitoring Officer and Committees team to check, and as of 8th June was reassured that all 30 District councillors have returned a form / confirmed no changes to a previous form: many thanks to all. At Town and Parish level there are still some gaps, and in each case where there are missing DPIs the Clerk has been emailed with a reminder. The list provided by the Committees team is as below (all forms are published at <https://folkestone-hythe.moderngov.co.uk/mgParishCouncilDetails.aspx?bcr=1> however some may have been submitted prior to the election and no confirmation received as yet if they are still valid, which is required). Thanks to Brookland, Burmarsh, Sandgate (and New Romney when the post arrives!) for a full set.

Town/Parish	No. of Councillors	No of DPI's received to date/No change email
Brenzett	4	1
Brookland	4	4
Burmarsh	5	5
Dymchurch	8	5
Elham	6	3
Elmsted	7	6
Folkestone	18	16
Hawkinge	12	8
Hythe	16	15
Ivychurch	3	1
Lydd	16	14
Lyminge	5	0
Lympne	5	0
		8
New Romney	13	(The parish have confirmed all have been sent via post)
		1
Newchurch	5	(Some members have recently been co-opted)
		0
Newington	5	(Only recently taken office)
Postling	6	0
Saltwood	3	1
Sandgate	11	11
Sellindge	7	0
St Marys in the Marsh	7	6
Stanford	5	1
Stelling Minnis	6	3
Swingfield	6	3

3. Report of Councillor Mike Blakemore, the Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration

Since being appointed to Cabinet I have attended full council and several induction and training sessions, including on the constitution, finance, planning and safeguarding. The last of these was particularly relevant as safeguarding is part of my portfolio. As the cabinet member for Community & Collaboration as well as a Cheriton councillor, I was also pleased to attend the unveiling of a portrait of the King at the Nepalese Community Centre. This provided a great opportunity to meet not just members of the Nepalese community but also other guests I want to have good relationships with in the future.

I have also begun the process of meeting all those responsible for the areas of work covered by my broad portfolio, beginning with communications, Lifeline, events and community safety and touching on others too. I will be continuing these initial meetings and then having regular catchups.

4. Report of Councillor Polly Blakemore, the Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services & Building Control

I was thrilled to be appointed to cabinet on 31st May and since then I have been busy meeting with officers to get up to speed with this wide-ranging portfolio.

No time was lost for parking to be pushed straight to the top of my agenda with a briefing by Fred Miller on Transportation & Parking across the district. I am in touch with KCC members regarding two proposed amendments to existing Controlled Parking Zones and have also been contacted by residents about the CPZ on The Stade. I am in discussion with Fred & Paul Thompson regarding these complaints. The Joint Transportation Board is next on my agenda as I seek to understand and address some issues inherited from the previous administration.

As regards the Regulatory and Building Control aspect of my portfolio, I have met with Ewan Green and Andrew Rush who both did a great job briefing me on the council's responsibilities and making me aware of the most pressing issues.

I will be meeting officers monthly for briefings with regular contact in between these fixed points.

5. Report of Councillor Gary Fuller, the Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Accountability

To date I have met with the heads of most of the service areas relevant to my new portfolio. I will be meeting with the Monitoring Officer during the week beginning 12th June and will be having regular portfolio meetings going forwards. It has been great, as I settle into my new role, to put faces to names and acquaint myself with officers I had previously met as an opposition Councillor.

There will be various challenges and opportunities over the next few months. On the IT side of the organisation, there are ongoing cyber threats, potential movement of infrastructure, and the incredible work to continuously improve our digital services. On the Resident Services front, we will be reviewing our Customer Access Strategy, Customer Access Points, and ensuring that we maintain excellent levels of service despite significant budgetary constraints.

My first decision as a cabinet member involved the movement of a vast quantity of data that we need to retain for the next few years from within a legacy system that is no longer fit for purpose to a new system. After a barrage of questions from me, and Herculean levels of patience from officers, the decision should now have been published and the work can proceed (subject to call in, of course).

6. Report of Councillor Rich Holgate, the Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy

Early days across the portfolio getting set up and being on leave.

However, we have already begun to connect with our Heritage partners across the district and look forward to creating meaningful relationships there.

Plenty of work ahead for Place Plan, economy and tourism as we turn our head towards the next four years. Of course, the biggest achievement coming for our ward (and district) residents with the stopping of the unwanted Princes Parade development'.

7. Report of Councillor Stephen Scoffham, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity

This is an extensive portfolio which spans many different areas of operation. One of the initial tasks is to identify options and priorities for both the immediate and medium term. Building on and developing work that is already underway and drawing on existing reports and policies is a key part of this process. Taking these into account and building relationships with the various officers concerned is an ongoing process which is liable to take several months or more.

As a Councillor who is new to this portfolio, I have established a number of contacts and arranged meetings so I can be more fully briefed with developments within and beyond the District. These include:

- Finding out more about cycling in Folkestone and the needs of local cyclists

- A briefing meeting with the Estates Manager from Kent Wildlife Trust regarding their plans to purchase Covert Wood, an area of ancient woodland and high ecological significance on the northern perimeter of the Folkestone and Hythe District.
- A briefing meeting with the Regional Manager for the RSPB who, among other things, manages the reserve at Dungeness and other key sites around East Kent.
- Investigating the plans for a UNESCO Cross Channel Geo Park focused on the chalk downland habitat that spans areas of SE and Northern France and is of international significance.

There will be many other opportunities to support initiatives which enhance biodiversity and help mitigate climate change in the coming months.

8. Report of Councillor Rebecca Shoob, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

As portfolio holder for Housing and Homelessness, I've had introductory meetings with the Director and Chief Officer for Housing who have given me a great overview of the housing team and its daily operations, as well as an outline of some of key challenges and opportunities ahead. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their invaluable guidance and introduction to the brief.

I have already had a wide range of casework and queries from residents and fellow councillors and I'm grateful to officers for their assistance with this. I'm very grateful too to my predecessor, Cllr Godfrey, for his good wishes and handover support.

I'm very much looking forward to attending the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel and to working with the Chair and tenant representatives.

Finally, a reminder that officers will be leading a briefing on Housing and Homelessness for all Members on 26th June and I hope that as many councillors as possible will be able to join.

9. Report of Councillor Jeremy Speakman, the Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

Since taking the Portfolio for Assets and Operations last month, I have been involved in the following;

- Correspondence with local resident, Council members and officers regarding ground maintenance, community safety and rough sleepers initiative in relation to the Vinery area of the Leas. Ground maintenance attended to by officers, and community safety/homelessness issues reported to relevant directorate.
- Correspondence with a resident and joint visit to inspect deterioration of a section of Royal Military Canal path, reporting to officers and related enquiries - ongoing
- Correspondence with residents in relation to the current maintenance and future development plans relating to Hythe Pool. Ongoing discussions with Council members and officers – ongoing.
- Correspondence with residents identifying issues of overflowing bins and graffiti in the Seabrook area. Reported and subsequently attended to by officers
- Visited Pergola construction site at Kingsnorth Gardens and reported back to resident who had expressed concerns
- Attended and spoke at the Paddle Out event at Sunny Sands organised by Surfers Against Sewage
- Attended an event with the Leader, Mayor of Hythe, fellow Councillors and several children from Seabrook Primary School in support of Luke Douglas-Home Coastal Run highlighting environmental protection issues.
- Extensive discussions with lead officers reviewing contingency plans in the event of a strike by Veolia staff
- Beginning discussions with lead officers around short, medium, and long term objectives as part of an overall strategy to take forward Green Party manifesto commitments relating to reuse and recycling.
- Beginning discussions with lead officers on short, medium, and long term objectives as part of overall strategy to take forward Green Party manifesto commitments on promoting biodiversity in green spaces.
- Attending all training, Council, Cabinet and Council meetings as required
- Had first of regular monthly meetings separately with Andy Blaszkowicz and Ewan Green.

I would like to add that I have been greatly impressed by the courtesy and willingness of officers to assist with a range of issues I have raised with them. Without exception these have been dealt with promptly and very efficiently.