

**Council – 29 March 2023**

**Councillor Questions:**

**1. From Councillor Gane to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds maintenance**

Would FHDC consider putting in some form of extra lighting in Broomfield Car Park? The park is well used and the council a few years ago sold off some land. The result is a Nursery School. The single light is not enough therefore lighting would help not just car users but also residents.

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Gane. There is no budget currently available to install new streetlights in Broomfield Crescent, or within the car park, but officers are currently looking into whether the flood lights in the car park can be enhanced to distribute lighting more effectively in the area.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

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

Can the Leader gives us an update on the secretive offer from the mystery prospective buyer of Prince's Parade?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you, Councillor Martin for your question. At the Cabinet meeting on 22nd February 2023 members agreed to instruct officers to consider the offer and potential next steps following successful implementation of the planning permission agreed under option B in report C/22/73 at the Cabinet meeting on 14th December 2022.

Officers will consider the offer and potential next steps after the current work to implement the planning permission has been completed.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Will Councillor Monk now apologies to the people of Hythe for all the destruction?

**ANSWER:**

I do not believe I have anything to apologise for. I believe I should be applauded for having led a council that was looking to improve the standing of Hythe in placemaking, which is what this project is. As I said earlier, a lot of verbal abuse has come my way, and I have just swallowed it. I have listened every time we have been criticised, and I have thoroughly examined my

conscious to see whether what I think I'm doing is right, and what the group is asking me to do is right, and every time I've come up with the answer that yes, it is. Yes, we have had a lot of frustrations and impediments in implementing it, and it is up in the air at the moment. We need to finish implementing the planning permission, and that comes the other side of an election. Where we will all be in the next administration, who knows, but no, I have no regrets and I am proud of our placemaking policies and agenda.

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

What conversations have taken place between Kent County Council and Folkestone and Hythe District Council about the future of Folkestone Central library?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Davidson.

I am aware that officer level discussions between the Council and Kent County Council are ongoing about the potential for the county council to take some space in Folca for a range of services, and latterly this has included the potential for library provision. These discussions are at an early stage and currently options for the configuration of space in the building are being developed. Proposals for the uses within Folca will be brought forward to Members in due course.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

When did those discussions begin, and why have the local councillors and community who the library belongs to not been involved, is it a secret plan?

**ANSWER:**

No. I don't think there is a secret plan. As far as I am aware it is only in the recent days that we have been advised of the possibility of the library closing, so there haven't been any secret meetings, we were simply not aware. As soon as we were aware, discussions took place.

**4. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy**

Saga is withdrawing from Enbrook Park, how will local businesses be able to recover the losses that those staff members make to the local economy on a daily basis?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor McConville.

Saga made a commercial decision based on the current work pattern of their staff that has emerged since Covid. As reported widely by Saga to a range of stakeholders, the Enbrook office was designed to house 1,000 employees and now only a fraction of that workforce (approximately 120) use the building. Therefore, the effects of changed working patterns, post covid, has already been felt by the local area. We continue to work with Saga as they have taken space in Connect 38, the Council owned office development. SAGA are also working with the Council and Otterpool Park LLP to explore a longer-term option of potential relocation to the new garden town.

The Council continues to work with other businesses with premises or those that have employees resident in our district through the Folkestone and Hythe Business Advisory Board and through our Folkestone Works website which contains useful information for our business community, and details of grants available. I am also very proud of the fact that we helped businesses across the district with the £3 million high street fund, which every single business was entitled to apply for.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**5. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council**

How much money does this council spend on in-house postage for officers and councillors? This includes posting correspondence sent to the civic centre onto councillors and officers home addresses.

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor McConville. I can confirm that last year we spent a total of £193,880.43 on postage.

The majority of post is sent out second class, with first class and recorded delivery used only in urgent or other exceptional cases.

The post room processes over 350,000 pieces of correspondence annually, the largest of which is the demand for council tax billing. We do not record the postage of items by officer or Councillor, but consider this to be a very small proportion of outgoing post cost.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**6. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Prater, Cabinet Member for Revenues, Benefits, Anti-Fraud and Corruption**

Please provide the council with the number of households who have applied for the Household Support fund and the total funds released to date?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor McConville, from myself and the award winning revenues and benefits teams. They have received 3 national awards in the last three years, including excellence in education and staff development, excellence in social inclusion, and current holders of the IRRV Benefits team of the year. The team have been a success story of this council over last three years, despite the huge challenges of covid and other things thrown at them and councils across the country. I'm sure all Councillors are proud of the team, and thank them for their work in supporting our community over that time.

There have been three phases of the Housing Support Fund administered by the team.

- HSF Tranche 1 (January to end of March 2022): Total Spend £274,239 with 1,419 households receiving support. The original funding was £171,359 and this was topped up upon request by KCC for admin and additional support.
- HSF Tranche 2 (July to end of September 2022): Total Spend £505,269, with 1,531 households receiving support. The original funding was £459,669 and this was topped up upon request by KCC for admin and additional support.
- HSF Tranche 3 (November to end of March 2023) Figures correct up to the end of February 2023: £148,397 spent from 1,278 applications. The original funding was £207,246 and this is on target to be fully spent by Friday.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**7. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Prater, Cabinet Member for Revenues, Benefits, Anti-Fraud and Corruption**

Please provide the council with the number of households who have applied for the home essential fund and the total funds released to date?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor McConville.

The following figures are correct up to the end of February 2023: £16,596 spent for 39 households.

The total funding available up until the end of March 2023 is £70,768 across 6 areas of spend. Most areas will be fully spent although there is some expected underspend due to the short timeframes which the Council had to deliver the scheme in year 1. We have requested that this be carried forward to continue spending on year 2.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Could I have a breakdown of what this money has been spent on? I know it's largely white goods and things, but it would be good to get an idea of what the demand is.

**ANSWER:**

If you can bear with us until the end of the month, then I'm happy for the team to come back to you with a full report detailing the tranches.

*After the meeting, the following additional response was provided:*

*Until the end of March 2023 the Home Essential Fund spend is:*

- £5,180 spent on providing slow cookers and heated blankets to residents.
- £3,445 spent on oil support.
- £25,394 spent on white goods provision.
- £10,149 spent on providing beds/mattresses.
- Boiler serving and replacement has not had any uptake until the end of March but the team have cases ongoing with regards to these areas.

**8. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Special Projects**

At Cabinet last week it was decided to proceed with the local authority housing fund. As full council still need to approve the match funding required to purchase the 10 properties required, does the cabinet member think it is realistic that this can be achieved by November?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor McConville. You'll note that approval for the fund is being sought later at this meeting. Whilst the timeframe for this important project is tight, officers have already completed some background work to assess the number of potential properties likely to be available for acquisition in the district over the coming months. Based on this work, I have been assured that it will be possible to achieve the 10 property acquisitions, as required under the terms of the scheme, by the end of November this year.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

In terms of ensuring the houses we purchase are of a good standard, what procedures do you have in place to either score or grade the prospective properties?

**ANSWER:**

I haven't got the details of those procedures to hand, but we won't purchase any old rubbish, we will purchase properties suitable to live in, and we will spend money wisely to improve them to a suitable standard.

If you wish to take this up with me with the procedures to hand, I'd be happy to discuss them further.

9. **From Councillor Meade to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council**

With confirmation of levelling up funding for the town, does the council yet have a timeline to take works forward and does it include further public consultation?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Meade. Officers are working with partners, including Kent County Council and specialist design consultants, to refine the timeline for delivery of the project. This will be published on the Council web site in due course. The Council is committed to ongoing public engagement throughout the Levelling Up project and a Stakeholder and Communications Strategy is being developed. Again, this will be published on the Council web site.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can we publish when the consultation will start to happen as soon as possible so all Folkestone Councillors can put that out to all the public groups?

**ANSWER:**

I can assure you we will get this on as soon as we can. The timeline is short, so we have to move fast.

10. **From Councillor Meade to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building control**

With the holiday season and summer fast approaching, can the cabinet member please advise whether there will be an increase in public rubbish bin collections along the whole of our seafront in Folkestone i.e. from the Leas through the Stade down to Sunny Sands, to ensure we do not have the continued overflowing litter that we have experienced over the last few years?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Meade.

The council have worked with the contractors Veolia over several years to enhance the street cleansing service and to put in place robust plans to meet the demands of the summer season. This has included Veolia changing rotas to ensure more staff are available for busy periods and improving the supervision arrangements for the weekend. Staff from the enforcement team are also routinely deployed over the summer and check for, and report, overflowing bins amongst other duties.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> April, Veolia will be scaling up their street cleansing operation for the summer. As in previous years, this involves the deployment of bulk bins at popular locations to increase litter bin capacity. Veolia will also start working their later summer hours and routes and employ additional beach cleaners for the season.

As the popularity of the district continues to grow, inevitably there will be busy periods when litter bins will become full even with the extra capacity deployed. As members know, there are also times when due to sheer numbers of visitors walking around, safely accessing some areas can be a particular challenge. One solution to this is to ask the public to take their litter home. Fly tipping and leaving rubbish by bins is not acceptable, results in additional work and costs, and we will be communicating this message as in previous years.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

None.

**11. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance**

In the past fortnight we have seen leisure centre pools close and go into administration in Sevenoaks and Edenbridge. Can we be given assurances about the financial security of our own district swimming pools in Folkestone and Hythe?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Davison.

There are no current plans to close Hythe Pool. Furthermore, the council has also recently confirmed to Folkestone Sports Centre Trust, £450,000 of continued grant funding to support community swimming provision at Folkestone Sports Centre, representing £150,000 for the next three years, starting from 1 April 2023.

It is worth saying that the leisure sector, and in particular swimming pools are facing severe financial challenges at present. Attendance is still recovering from the pandemic, there is a national shortage of qualified lifeguards which is impacting on operations, and above all, the high costs of energy, which impact heavily on swimming pools due to the energy needed to maintain water temperatures, pumping, filtering, and recirculating the water. The additional £63.3m Swimming Pool Support Fund announced by the government in the Budget, which will be administered by Sport England, is welcome. The Council will be looking to bid for support for Hythe Pool, depending on the application requirements, which are still to be announced.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Would that bid cover Folkestone as well?

**ANSWER:**

We have agreed to fund the Folkestone Sports Centre Trust, and I would imagine our officers would investigate this option if indeed it is open to us.

**12. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council**

An Electoral Commission survey carried out in February 2022, found that 4% of people in Britain (equivalent to around 1.9m voters) did not have any of the pre-existing forms of photo ID now required to vote in this May's forthcoming local elections. What percentage and number of the district's electorate have applied for the alternative Voter ID certificate by this point?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Davison. I can confirm (at the time of writing) that as of Monday, the Council has received 78 Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) applications which represents 0.09% of our electorate.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

I'm still meeting people and businesses who are unaware of this requirement in May, and we don't want to see people turned away, unable to vote, so what can we do to get this message out and how can Councillors help?

**ANSWER:**

I will get you a written reply to that, because it isn't down to the council to do that, it is down to the electoral returns officer, so I will get you a reply.

*After the meeting, the following response was provided:  
Over 600+ posters have been circulated to shops and businesses across the district, reference has been included in council tax letters, an article was included in the latest Your District Today publication, social media posts*



*continue, and a footer is included in all emails that are sent out from the council, in order to supplement the national advertising campaign.*

*In addition, we have contacted our local database of community groups and voluntary sector businesses through our Community Safety colleagues to promote and send out literature about the requirements of Voter ID.*

*Our housing team and area officers have also provided literature for display in sheltered accommodation.*

*Officers from the elections team visited local venues that have community noticeboards to attach our posters.*

*Our communications strategy was in place very early on to ensure press releases were sent out in a timely manner and they have been in conjunction with milestones from the Electoral Commission and Department of Housing, Levelling Up, Communities.*

*All staff, councillors and candidates for the election were informed of the changes, literature was also been sent to Parish and Town Councils for them to display on their websites and noticeboards.*

*And finally, callers to our customer service lines, while in the queue, hear a message informing people of the voter ID requirements*

13. **From Councillor Keen to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance**

The Leas Cliff Hall is a wonderful community resource and one that brings a lot of visitors to Folkestone to see shows and attend events that are put on at the there. My concern after a visit last week is how shabby and run down the building looks and is. The fact that there are large area of damp on walls around the venue and also the windows that are on the sea side of the window are mouldy and rusty and parts of the building smell of damp. Could we please be advised as to what maintenance the lease hold of the building is responsibility for and what is the responsibility of FHDC?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Keen.

The Council meets the Leas Cliff Hall operators regularly to discuss the maintenance of the hall which, generally, is the responsibility of the tenant. The hall is in a very exposed location and is built into the cliff making it a challenge when dealing with water ingress. However, significant works have been undertaken in relation to water ingress and rectifying the damage it has caused. Works currently proposed by the tenant include repairs to the asphalt roof finish to rectify leaks and the replacement of doors and windows either side of the main hall stage. The operator has advised that it has a rolling

re-decoration programme but there are some areas where water ingress has been resolved but the building fabric must dry out before decorations, etc. can be undertaken. We will continue to regularly meet with the tenant and monitor the maintenance of the building.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can you advise when we meet with the leaseholder, as it doesn't look to me as if any rolling work has taken place for a considerable time?

**ANSWER:**

Yes, that is a fair question, and I will certainly speak to officers and ensure that I or my successor is provided with that information on a regular basis.

*After the meeting, the following additional response was provided:*

*Meetings are held with the tenant (i.e., The Ambassador Theatre Group) on a quarterly (or thereabouts) basis, the latest being on 23 January 2023 with the next due on 5 April 2023 – these generally relate to the tenant's maintenance and management of the venue. The meetings are attended by FHDC's Chief Officer – Place & Regulatory Services and representatives of the Estates & Assets team.*

*Referring to records, works completed in recent years by the tenant include:*

1. *Internal -*
  - a. *Carpets and flooring replaced in corridor, Green Room, toilets, and showers on level 4 (2013).*
  - b. *Structural repairs on various levels (2016 – 2017).*
  - c. *Replacement of two lifts (2017).*
  - d. *Refurbishment of male toilets adjacent to main hall (2017).*
  - e. *Re-carpeting to Channel Suite (2016) and level 7 (2018).*
  - f. *Plaster repairs around windows to level 7/upper hall level (2018).*
  - g. *Ceiling repairs to level 7 (2018) and over main hall (2022) – in addition to an annual inspection of all ceilings.*
  - h. *New replacement kitchen air extraction unit and ducting (2019).*
  - i. *Floor of main hall sanded and sealed (2014 and 2020).*
  - j. *Internal decorations throughout, excluding gold detailing in hall and foyer (2019).*
  - k. *Electrical installation condition report obtained and works undertaken (2020). The whole installation is due to be re-inspected over a three-year period (2022-2024).*
  - l. *All curtains replaced to levels 5, 6 and 7 (2021).*
2. *External -*
  - a. *Repairs to drainage and asphalt to The Leas promenade (2015-17).*
  - b. *Improvements to lightning protection (2016).*
  - c. *Waterproofing to levels 5, 7 and 8 including new tiled chequerboard and repairs and redecoration of railings, gutters and steps (2017).*
  - d. *Window redecorations (2017 and 2018).*

- e. *Main gas supply pipe replaced (2018).*
- f. *Replacement of two metal windows (west elevation), level 5 (2019).*
- g. *Replacement of all timber deckings to balconies to levels 3 and 5 (2019).*
- h. *Decorations to all metalwork excluding windows, timber balcony deckings retreated to levels 3 and 5, all rendering to level 8 redecorated, brise soleil to Channel Suite redecorated (2022).*

*Works being considered for the near future include:*

- I. *Keg lift replacement.*
- II. *Internal decorations including parts of the Channel Suite, the dressing rooms, and the reinstatement of ceilings and redecorations to the Marketing Suite and adjacent Print Room.*
- III. *New flooring to the main hall.*
- IV. *Repairs to the asphalt to The Leas promenade to rectify leaks.*
- V. *Replacement of external doors and windows either side of the main hall stage.*

**14. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Collier, Cabinet Member for Property Management and Grounds Maintenance**

I have had a number of messages over the last few weeks about the security of the beach huts. With the huge cost of beach huts what security are we offering lease holders? Not only are the huts being damaged during the break ins but our lease holders possessions are being stolen. All have to have insurance but I would assume that we have to repair the damage that is caused and this will have a cost. My question is what security can we offer our lease holders and what to date has been the cost of repairing the damaged huts?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Keen

Unfortunately due to the isolated position of the Folkestone beach huts they are vulnerable to vandalism. In relation to the recent spate of break-ins, the council is going to mechanically fix the corner batons to the beach huts (which were levered off by vandals to cause damage to the cladding). The effectiveness of the CCTV monitoring the beach huts is going to be reviewed by Folkestone Town Council, and we will consider placing additional CCTV cameras to monitor the beach huts subject to budget availability. The council's Maintenance Officer has spent considerable time at the huts and now temporarily repaired all vandalised huts. The weatherboard fixed to the huts has to be ordered in and, upon receipt and treatment, the temporary repairs will be finalised.

To date, over £4,000 has been spent repairing the damaged huts.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

It seems to me you are in negotiation with the town council. Can we do this immediately in order to get cameras put in for the wellbeing of the people who paid high rents for those wooden huts?

**ANSWER:**

I must take exception to the statement of very high rents. I have previously explained that beach hut rentals are quite competitive, particularly in view of the long waiting list. I don't want to indicate negativity; this is a point well made. The tenants are suffering with break-ins and having possessions stolen. We will expedite our enquiries to seek to improve the CCTV.

15. **From Councillor Keen to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council**

Recently I read on page 4 of the latest set of Oportunitas accounts year end 31st March 2022 Quote . Directors of Oportunitas and the staff who support the company are the employees of the parent organisation FHDC. It is my understanding that no employee of FHDC maybe elected or hold office as a member of the local authority by which they are employed. So, the question has to be asked, as the Directors are employees of the council how they can also be Councillors?

**ANSWER:**

Thank you for your question Councillor Keen. Note 3 to the Oportunitas Limited Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022 incorrectly states that the Directors of Oportunitas are employees of the parent organisation, Folkestone and Hythe District Council.

The note should read 'The staff who support the company are the employees of the parent organisation, Folkestone and Hythe District Council'.

As a disclosure note only, this is not a material error to the company's audited Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022.

However, this will be addressed when the company's Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 are produced later this year.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:**

Can we be sure that that isn't also part of the agreement with the directors of Otterpool Park too?

**ANSWER:**

As I've always said, if you give us some notice of the question, then I can get an answer. I'm not going to try one off the hoof.

*After the meeting, the following further response was provided:*

*Members who are Directors of Otterpool Park LLP are not employees of the Council. The staff who support the company are directly employed by Otterpool Park LLP.*