

Public Document Pack

FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 2 April 2025

Present: Councillors Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Mike Blakemore, Polly Blakemore, James Butcher, Bridget Chapman, Tony Cooper, Laura Davison, Gary Fuller, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Anthony Hills, Rich Holgate, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Anita Jones, Nicola Keen, Adrian Lockwood, Alan Martin, Elaine Martin, Jim Martin, Connor McConville, Liz McShane, Jackie Meade, Tim Prater, Stephen Scoffham, Rebecca Shoob, Jeremy Speakman, Paul Thomas, Belinda Walker, David Wimble and John Wing

Apologies for Absence: None.

84. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Hills and Meade made voluntary declarations in respect of their roles as KCC Councillors.

85. Minutes

In respect of the minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2025, a member proposed the following amendments:

That the wording “It added that it did not sit right with him that the Green and Conservative Members had handed control of the councils arrangements”

Be amended to read:

“**He** added that it did not sit right with him that the Green, Conservative **and Reform UK** Members had handed control of the **council’s** arrangements”

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meetings held on 19th and 26th February, and 20th March 2025 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chair.

86. Chair's Communications

The Chair gave the following communications:

“Good evening. Thank you to those of you who bought a food donation for the Rainbow Centre this evening. They are currently celebrating their 40th year, and I am grateful for all their work supporting our residents over this time. Since my last communications, I have attended a number of both in and out of our District.

At the end of February, we celebrated 20 years of the Folkestone Nepalese Community at an event in the Burstin. The Nepalese community have added so much to our community and I am thankful for everything they have done.

I was proud to attend the Twin Fair in Calais at the start of March on behalf of the District. We met the Mayor of Calais and discussed how we can improve links between our countries and communities.

We celebrated International Women's Day during March. I attended a lovely event in New Romney with an inspiring speaker - Susie Warran-Smith CBE DL who spoke about how we need to accelerate our journey towards equality in the workplace to ensure that it doesn't take another 130 years to put us on an equal footing. I would personally like to say thank you to all our fantastic female councillors, and female council officers as you are amazing role models for our younger generation.

I attended two music events - a concert by our fabulous Folkestone Symphony Orchestra and a Kent Young Musicians event in Medway.

In Folkestone, I attended a fascinating play by the Folkestone Performing Arts Company called the Leech of Folkestone. This is set in the Romney Marsh and has folklore, comedy and supernatural themes. They are planning to take it on tour later this year, so please support them if you can.

I was delighted to host our first District Youth Forum. This was a fantastic event which brought together nearly 50 young people from all over our District to question councillors, discuss the environment and Green Grants, highlight safety issues in the District and raise other issues which are important to them. I am looking forward to them returning later this year. Thank you to the officers who helped organise and support this - particularly Jo Gage, and the councillors who helped shape the event - Cllr Mike Blakemore and Cllr Stephen Scoffham.

I was pleased to follow this up in my Town Council Role with a Youth Forum for the primary school children in Hythe based on the same themes we discussed with senior school children and I was delighted that young people from Brockhill School helped Chair and facilitate the meeting.

To celebrate the start of spring, I attended a multi-faith event in Maidstone which celebrated the many different faiths that make up our communities. It's so important to understand and respect each other in our beliefs.

Finally, I was delighted to attend the Triennial launch event on Monday evening. They announced their theme - How Lies the Land and the artists that will be transforming parts of Folkestone in the summer. This is always an amazing event and brings a huge amount of tourism to Folkestone, so please make every effort to support it!"

87. Petitions

There were no petitions.

88. Questions from the Public

The questions asked, including supplementary questions, and the answers given are set out in Schedule 1, appended to these minutes.

89. Questions from Councillors

The questions asked, including supplementary questions, and the answers given are set out in Schedule 2, appended to these minutes.

90. Announcements of the Leader of the Council

The Leader made the following announcements:

“Good evening Councillors, the recent good weather has given me the inclination to change the format of my Leader’s Announcements this month, rather than set out what I have been doing, I thought it might be interesting to see what we, together, as a Council have achieved in recent months.

As usual I have been attending meetings with Parish Councils, other organisations, developers, consultants, individuals and businesses in our wonderful District, and I will continue to do so.

Local Government Reorganisation

I want firstly to thank every Councillor for participating so willingly in discussions surrounding Local Government reorganisation. Very few Councils held public meetings, Council meetings and Cabinet meetings to discuss, but we did. I was struck during those meetings of the prevailing intention of members to find the best solution for the people they represent, this reflects the cooperation and consensus that I have witnessed since becoming Leader. I thank everyone in this Chamber for their open-minded approach, time and commitment. The submission is now with the Government and I attended a Webinar with Jim McMahon the Minister responsible, he thanked me personally (along with the other 137 people on the call) and he asked me to pass on his thanks to you. We will receive some feedback shortly, then we along, with our Kent Colleagues will begin the process of submitting our final proposal in November.

Otterpool - Collaboration Agreement

I am absolutely delighted to confirm the Collaboration Agreement with Homes England has been signed by ourselves and Homes England. The agreement runs from the 1st February 2025 for six months with the possibility of a three-month extension if the parties agree. The agreement means that Homes England will pay us £1.56M as a contribution to our historic planning costs, and share 50% of the relevant Otterpool Park costs in 25/26 incurred through the

Collaboration Agreement period. Councillors will of course recall that our Chief Executive and I, were instructed by the Council to seek a Strategic Partner for Otterpool to work alongside us. The purpose of the Collaboration Agreement is to become Strategic Partners with Homes England in preparing a public sector funding case and work together in delivering our landscape-led Garden Town.

Balanced Budget and completed Audit Trail

As we conclude our financial year, I just want to highlight our great achievement in agreeing a balanced budget together with settled accounts from previous years. There has been an enormous amount of work which has taken place to get the Council into this position. Councillors will know that many District and Borough Councils across the country are struggling, and I think our enviable position is a great testament to the quality of our Council team, it's leadership but also the cooperation and consensus in this Chamber. I would like to thank the members of both Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance for their hard work and oversight of what has been a significant improvement in our position.

Special Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund

It gives me great pleasure to announce that our officers have recently made 2 very successful bids and we have received £327,146 from the Special Prosperity Fund and £171,402 from the Rural Prosperity Fund for projects in the District. Well done to our fantastic team.

A Focus on Young People

As Councillors know, I was delighted to attend the Youth Forum in this Chamber, this initiative was proposed and supported by many Councillors, organised by our Chair Councillor Jones and delivered by our hard working team. I was even more delighted to have our Youth Forum meeting reported in the Local Government Association magazine, where we were congratulated for involving young people in the democratic process. I know our Chair has already made plans to build on her achievements in bringing young people into the process of government and she has my unequivocal support in that aim.

New Corporate Plan

I cannot speak highly enough of our new Corporate Plan. Again, I congratulate both the members who gave their time, experience and expertise to the Corporate Plan Working Group and the officers who worked so hard to make sense of our collective ideas. I am certain than our Corporate Plan will be adopted as a template for future Corporate Plans as we move into a new unitary.

Folkestone A Brighter Future

I am so very pleased to announce that work on Folkestone: A Brighter Future is set to commence. I am confident that the works, having gone through extensive consultation, will lead the regeneration of the town centre in Folkestone.

Decarbonisation Grant for FOLCA2

While I am on the regeneration of the Centre of Folkestone theme, I am happy to announce that our brilliant team have secured grant funding for a heat pump, heating system in FOLCA2, in the sum of £1.44M. This is great news for the project overall, but it will also greatly help in the Council's long held ambition to become net zero.

Folkestone Sport Centre

I have some more very good news for Folkestone, I was told yesterday evening that the Administrator has confirmed receipt of the deposit paid by the Sports Trust and the sale of the Folkestone Sports Centre should be completed in the next few days. This is good news for everyone who has worked so hard to keep the Sports Centre open.

Green Community Grants

Our Green Community Grants Programme has opened, and there were already 50 expressions of interest. All community groups, Town and Parish Councils will be encouraged to apply for Grants to, for example, improve the performance of their buildings, saving energy, carbon and money. The grants will also help local businesses, charities, community groups, parish and town Councils to increase their Climate resilience, enhance green spaces and support local wildlife and I am grateful to all members and staff for making this happen.

Council House Programme

While I am listing achievements, I cannot miss our fantastic Council House Programme! When we first met in May 2023 we agreed a build target of 80 Council homes, 20 to be constructed per year. I am overjoyed to report that our current agreed pipeline will deliver 99 affordable council homes over the next 24 months with another 77 affordable homes being delivered by Orbit on our site at Biggins Wood in the same period, and on a personal note this includes 27 Council Homes in Hythe. There are too many factors to list, that has led to this growth, but ultimately it is due to our portfolio holder and team who make themselves available to developers and are open and engaged in solving problems in housing delivery. Again, well done team!

Two Year Pay Agreement with Staff and Unions

Finally, just a word of thanks and reflection, we have agreed a two year pay agreement with staff and their unions. I mention this because, I am sure Councillors will be aware of other Councils elsewhere who are unable to agree similar arrangements and are being torn apart in the consequential conflict that inevitably follows. My thanks naturally, go to our personnel committee who led the negotiations but mainly my thanks and the thanks of all residents of Folkestone and Hythe District must go to our fabulous staff. This is not an easy time for people making their careers in Local Government, with Central Government austerity seemingly set to continue and coupled with the uncertainty of Local Government Reorganisation. Our Staff have, as they always do, acted professionally and put the Council first.

Consensus

I hope members have realised, this list of achievements is not aligned with any specific member or political party, indeed I have come to believe that politically, our finely balanced Chamber has promoted cooperation through the simple consensus of doing the best for the communities we represent, this is the consensus that binds us together and allows us to achieve great things together. Thank you.”

Both opposition Groups were then given an opportunity to respond to the points raised. Councillor Lockwood, on behalf of the Labour Group stated that he echoed the positive words about Sojan Joseph. He then added that if the decision was made to turn Everest Court into social housing, his group would support that. He appreciated the way all groups have been able to work together on things like the Corporate plan, and added that it's been nice that issues that all groups have brought to the table have been taken on board and largely accepted, which keeps opposition business down. He passed on his thanks to Councillor Davison for her contribution to the work. He stated that it was good news in respect of Otterpool Park, and the council could play a part in the national push to build many new homes across the country. With respect to local government reorganisation, it was good that Full Council were given the option to discuss the proposals, and there were not many other authorities who had done that. It seemed FHDC were also an outlier in running a public meeting, which was welcome. It was good to see lots of different types of funding coming in, and it would be nice to see 'spades in the ground' in respect of the Fola project. He stated that he was only able to be able to attend the start of the youth council and it was amazing to see young people in the chamber. He added that he had attended 'Turners got Talent' earlier that day, and stated that there is so much talent in our young people, which we should support, whether politically or in life. He advised that it was great news on sports centre, and passed his thanks to all involved in the 'save Folkestone Sports centre' group. He hoped it would be up and running soon. He stated that he would take issue with a point made about government austerity, as he was not aware of any at the moment. Finally, he stated that on the point of working together as a

council, this was important, and he thanked the Leader for making that point. It was a finely balanced chamber, but these achievements showed what working together could achieve.

Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee then responded and stated that working together had been great, despite not always agreeing. In terms of the Corporate Plan, she added that she was unable to get nuclear at Dungeness added to the plan, and she felt this was important, so wondered why it should not be included. She stated that local government reorganisation meetings had been great and feedback was awaited. In respect of Otterpool Park, she indicated she was delighted, as the only political group who voted for the project. She stated that it was great to hear how supportive people are of the project, and it would be good to know what will happen at the end of six months, and interesting to see who the council chose to work with as a main developer/strategic partner. She welcomed the contribution from Homes England. She added that the news about the signed off budgets was great, there were a number of issues to be resolved which took a long time. On young people, as the former Cabinet Member for communities, she stated that she had introduced an award for secondary schools which she hoped was being maintained. In respect of the Corporate Plan, it was great to see plans from previous administration coming forward, and she wished it well. It was great to have money coming forward in respect of Decarbonisation. The news in respect of the Special Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund was great and would help organisations in the district. It was really good news about the Sports Centre and she hoped to see an announcement shortly. She was pleased to hear about the Council house programme and stated that part of the planning system requires 15% of affordable housing on all developments over 15 units, and it was great to see those coming forward. She looked forward to seeing Bigginswood ones in due course. *As per paragraph 9.5 of the council procedure rules, the 5 minute time limit expired during Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee's response.*

The Leader then responded to the opposition leaders and advised that all the information he provided was purely a snapshot, and he would update members further as things progressed. He was happy with responses from both Group Leaders and he added that he genuinely believed the council achieved more if all groups worked together.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor J Martin; and

RESOLVED:

That the announcements of the Leader be noted.

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

91. **Portfolio Holder reports to Council**

The Portfolio Holder updates had been circulated within the agenda pack and noted by Members.

92. **Opposition Business**

There was no opposition business at the meeting.

93. **Motions on Notice**

There were no motions on notice at the meeting.

94. **Customer Feedback And Corporate Complaints Policy Review**

The report outlined a comprehensive review of council's Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy to ensure its in line with best practice defined under Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman (HO) complaint handling codes.

Proposed by Councillor Fuller,
Seconded by Councillor Prater; and

RESOLVED:

1. **That report C/24/28 be received and noted.**
2. **That the updated Customer Feedback and Corporate Complaints Policy set out in appendix 1 of the report be approved.**
3. **That the reduction in response times for all stage 1 corporate complaints from 20 to 10 working days to align with the LGSCO complaint handling code be approved.**

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

95. **Risk Management Policy and Strategy**

The report presented an updated Risk Management Policy and Strategy to Council for adoption. It also provided a copy of the Council's Corporate Risk Register, for information.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor Fuller; and

RESOLVED:

1. **That report A/24/27 be received and noted.**

2. **That the Risk Management Policy and Strategy (Appendix 1) be noted and approved; and,**
3. **That the Corporate Risk Register Overview (Appendix 2) be noted and approved.**

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

96. **Extension of the Term of office of Independent Member of the Audit and Governance Committee**

In December 2024, Full Council agreed to the recommendations of the Audit and Governance Committee to agree the extension of the Independent member to the Audit and Governance Committee to March 2025. The Audit Governance Committee met on 25 February 2025 and recommended that Andy Vanburen's term be extended.

Proposed by Councillor McShane,
Seconded by Councillor Butcher; and

RESOLVED:

1. **That report A/24/22 be received and noted.**
2. **That the appointment of Andy Vanburen be extended to 5 May 2027.**

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

97. **Appointment of Chief Finance Officer (S151 officer)**

The report set out recommendations on the appointment of a Chief Finance officer (Section 151 Officer).

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Holgate; and

RESOLVED:

1. **To receive and note report A/24/24.**
2. **To appoint Alan Mitchell as Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer) with effect from 3 April 2025 pursuant to s151 Local Government Act 1972.**

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

98. **Pay Policy Statement 2025/26**

The report considered the recommendation from the Personnel Committee and presents the pay policy statement for 2025/26 for approval.

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Holgate; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/24/23 be received and noted.**
- 2. That the recommendation of the Personnel Committee be noted.**
- 3. That under S38(1) Localism Act 2011 the updated Pay Policy Statement appended to the report for 2025/26 be approved**

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

99. Report to Council on a decision made in accordance with the constitution's call-in and urgency rule

The constitution provides that, when an urgent decision is made by the Cabinet or Cabinet Member, for which any delay in implementation, likely to be caused by the call-in process, would seriously prejudice the Council's or public interest, then the 'Call-in Rules of Procedure', Part 6.3, rules 1-6 do not apply. Decisions, taken as a matter of urgency, must be reported to the next available meeting of the Council, together with the reasons for urgency.

Proposed by Councillor Jim Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Prater; and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report A/24/25 be received and noted.**

(The recommendations were agreed by affirmation of the meeting).

Council – 2 April 2025

Public Questions and answers:

1. **From Mr P Oughton to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building control**

Why are there no signs in Metropole Rd West that prohibit overnight parking of Caravans, there are many signs in adjacent roads? They currently park on the Leas during the day and then move to Metropole Rd West overnight. We have experienced rubbish and human waste being deposited into our Garden following Campervans staying overnight.

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

I do recognise that the issue of parked motorhomes in Metropole Rd. West is a long standing one. The issues you have highlighted have as much to do with environmental crime as they do with parking. Following previous complaints, the Environmental Crime team have been monitoring this area and residents have been asked to log any issues via the council's website. So far, we have not found evidence of human waste, rubbish deposited on private land and associated problems but we do continue to patrol the area.

Permit parking restrictions have indeed recently been introduced in some nearby roads, and it was decided to include an overnight motor caravan ban after receiving several representations from residents about visitors with motorhomes occupying the limited parking spaces for several weeks/months at a time.

If we receive specific reports from the environmental team that they are unable to address issues such as long-term parking of motor caravans in Metropole Road West, we will be able to consider the introduction of new restrictions as we have done in the roads you mention in your question.

To help in this process please be sure to report any incidents of anti-social behaviour immediately via the council's online Report It tool as this enables us both to take timely action and to build a picture of the extent of the problem, which could also help support the case for a motorhome ban.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Have the council realised that following changes to parking restrictions in Grimstone Avenue and Bouverie Road West (implementation of permits and ban on camper vans), that many people who had previously used that parking were now using Metropol Road West and East, making it a single track road, and making passing difficult, particularly on sunny days when the Leas was busy?

ANSWER:

It's always tricky when new controlled parking restrictions were introduced. There have been some issues in that area which we are looking at and considering how we can relieve those issues.

Mr Button was not present at the meeting, so the Chair asked the question below on his behalf as per paragraph 8.7 of the Council procedure rules.

2. **From Mr R Button to Councillor M Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

Do you believe we should be in schools more engaging with students and encouraging them to speak up more especially those in primary?

ANSWER:

Thanks for your question, Mr Button.

Yes, I believe it's vital to try and engage young people in local democracy and the issues that affect them and their communities. If young people have a better idea of how decisions are made on their behalf they will be more likely to speak up and to try and effect change.

Democracy is one of our British Values and Ofsted assess schools on the extent to which they are including British Values in their curriculum. Many schools run mock elections and talk about the concept of democracy so that young people are better informed but we also have a part to play as councillors and as a council.

That's why soon after I was elected in 2023, I went along to Brockhill and the Turner School with other councillors to give a presentation explaining how local government works and how to get involved. This was a cross-party initiative, which we offered to all secondary schools in the district. Several councillors, as well as staff, have taken part in Turner Talks events, chatting with small groups of students at the Academy's secondary and primary schools.

As you know, this council recently held its first Youth Forum meeting with almost 50 young people aged 13+ involved in that, having done some good work last year engaging young people in consultation around the council's new corporate plan and the regeneration of Folkestone town centre. We also invited students from Brockhill to design a logo for the District Food Network, which the council hosts.

We also engage with young people through the Year 9 #Are you OK? Roadshow that covers topics such as safety, online bullying, and healthy lifestyles. We do talks in schools about careers and encouraging young people to register to vote.

You specifically mention primary school children, and we do engage with them in a targeted way on specific issues, for example:

As part of the consultation for the regeneration of Folkestone town centre, in November 2023, we had over 100 school children (mostly primary school aged) attend our event at the Quarterhouse where they could view plans for the town centre in virtual reality and feedback on designs. We have involved primary school children in the design of a play area in Bouverie Place, particularly those children with access needs. A year ago, Cllr Scoffham, the Cabinet member for Climate, Environment & Biodiversity welcomed 23 young people aged between 7 and 10 to the council chamber to pilot a Schools Sustainability Project, where the then chair of the council gave an insight into what full council meetings are like.

Last year, we also ran a focus group for children aged 7-11 in order to gather their ideas for the future of the district that fed into our corporate plan.

Cllr Scoffham and I are currently involved in a primary school competition with the Community Rail Partnership aimed at getting drivers to switch off their engines while waiting at train stations. It is an important issue but we were asked to be mindful of the children's climate anxiety – a reminder that we must be guided by teaching staff as to what is age appropriate, as well as what can be accommodated in schools' schedules.

We also support year 6 students via our Safety in Action roadshow. That is mostly about telling them about how to stay safe, but we do hear from them about their safety concerns.

Some town councils are also doing great engagement work with primary school aged children, for example, Hythe Town Council ran an event involving multiple Hythe primary schools to hear the views of young people. This is expected to happen again.

I think our focus will naturally be with older students, including via the Youth Forum, but you are right to highlight the importance of engaging those at primary school too. We would love to do more, but as with all of our work, we are limited by the budget and resource we have available. So, at a district council level our engagement with primary school aged children is targeted to specific issues, whilst with teenagers it tends to be broader.

As Mr Button was not present, there was no supplementary question.

This page is intentionally left blank

Council – 2 April 2025

Councillor Questions and answers:

1. **From Councillor Chapman to Councillor Mike Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration**

We recently learned that Napier Barracks in Shorncliffe is going to be closed in September this year. Before it opened as an asylum accommodation centre it had lain derelict for many years as it was no longer fit for purpose as army barracks. Do you agree that this military site was never a suitable place to accommodate vulnerable and often severely traumatised people and that the closure is therefore good news?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Chapman. You're right, it was far from ideal to begin with but when the barracks first opened, it was the first of its kind anywhere in the UK. It took new partnerships to be developed and working practices to be established on site to enable residents to be fully supported. The excellent partnership working with statutory partners, voluntary sector organisations with the managing organisation Clear Springs to develop the site over time with all of the excellent facilities now available – bespoke gym, wellbeing rooms, education classes, gardening projects, picnic benches, volunteering opportunities (which have been taken up with enthusiasm and something all in the community value). These and other indoor and outdoor facilities have enabled the site to become what it is today.

The close working relationships and listening to Service Users enabled an agreement to be reached where no Service User stayed there for more than 90 days. This was one of the biggest concerns of Service Users when they first arrived. None of this can happen overnight, it took time for these services to be established. So much so that the partnership working is considered some of the best of its kind nationally with other sites visiting and learning from the work carried out at the barracks to support its Service Users. Community engagement activity and reassurance work also helped alleviate tensions over time.

Listening and working with Service Users has been critical, catering issues were resolved and the site rarely sees problems now. The addition of a prescribing nurse and regular visits by Dent Aid on site also ensures the health of Service Users is prioritised.

The closure of Napier Barracks has always been part of the plan to handover the site back to the MOD and release to Taylor Wimpey who will develop the site for much needed homes.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Now that the land at Napier Barracks is finally to be developed for housing, can I ask you to work with your housing colleagues to look at acquiring some homes there, so that public money can finally do some public good on that site?

ANSWER:

As you know, we are already providing some affordable homes at the Shorncliffe development, and our aim is to provide them across the district, so I will certainly take that back for consideration.

2. **From Councillor Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

The Lyminge Community Hub proposed Community Interest Company has submitted a draft proposal to Cabinet Members and Ward Councillors for the retention of Everist Court as a Community facility. They have asked for a meeting with the Leader to consider this proposal. Will the Leader be meeting representatives of the group in order to explore more fully this proposal?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Hollingsbee. I know, as the Ward Councillor, this is a matter that you have taken a very real interest in. I am happy to confirm that I have received the draft proposal to which you refer that seeks to use Everist Court as a community facility. I have also met with the portfolio holder for Housing and Homelessness and senior members of the housing team to discuss the draft proposal, and the team's plans for the building. So, I am also well aware of all the issues.

With regards to meeting the representatives of the group, I have arranged to meet the group with our local MP, Sojan Joseph, who is also taking a real interest in the building's future use. We have agreed to meet the group on the 9th May in Lyminge, after initial surveys of the building have been carried out. I have had a meeting with Sojan and we have discussed the building, but we will attend the meeting with an open mind and we both encourage individuals and groups within our community to engage with us to help us develop and provide community facilities.

As everyone will be aware, Age UK surrendered their lease as of 31st March this year due to their Lyminge facility being financially unviable. Everist Court is owned by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), therefore it is a housing asset and is not owned by the Council's General Fund. Officers took a report to Corporate Leadership Team to seek authority to agree to the early lease surrender on the basis that the building could be turned back into much needed affordable homes designated for older people in our district.

As a housing asset, the portfolio holder for Housing and Homelessness and senior members of the housing team must consider what is in the best

interests of the HRA when decisions are made regarding the future use of its assets. In this instance it is believed that turning the building back into affordable flats for older people is in the best interests of the HRA and I am supportive of this course of action.

Officers will be surveying the building and bringing forward plans in due course, which is likely to lead to a planning application later this year. As with all planning applications consultation will be carried out. If for any reason the building cannot be re-converted back into suitable affordable accommodation, then of course Officers will consider alternative uses for the building.

As I know you are aware, as the Ward Councillor, there are several community buildings in Lyminge that would be well suited to the types of use proposed by the group. The Tayne Centre, Methodist Church, Scout hut and Village Hall all have potential with varying degrees of capacity, and other facilities, such as parking whereas the parking at Everist Court is limited.

Can I just quickly mention the work that Sojan Joseph is doing, Everist Court in Lyminge is just one of a number of projects that he is very actively involved with. I always find his interest, common sense and humanity extremely helpful in resolving issues.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can I assume the decision has been made and the property will be converted to housing, and if so, can this be reported back to the community group, sooner rather than later?

ANSWER:

The position with regards to the HRA is a very strong recommendation, but I will be going to the meeting with the group with an open mind. However, I have to say, we are in the middle of an extreme housing crisis and we desperately need affordable housing. These flats are designated for older people, where there is a real housing crisis. I will need a very convincing argument that there is a better use for that building, when there are alternative spaces available in Lyminge.

3. **From Councillor Keen to Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy**

In the Cabinet Member update report, published on 25 March 2025, Cllr Rich Holgate's update under *Folkestone: A Brighter Future* states:

"Jackson Civil Engineering has been awarded the contract to deliver the transformation scheme, with work beginning on Monday 7 April 2025 and due to complete in Summer 2026."

However, I have checked the Contracts Register on the 26th March 2025, and I was unable to find any entry, in either tab, for Jackson Civil Engineering.

Given that Jackson Civil Engineering is scheduled to begin work on the contract for - *Folkestone: A Brighter Future* on the 7th April -, how is it possible that, as of 25 March—the date the Cabinet Member's report was published—and following a review of the Contracts Register on 26 March, the company does not appear on the register, and no details have been made publicly available regarding the contract's scope or value.

Can the Cabinet Member explain how such a substantial contract appears to have bypassed the standard principles of transparency and accountability—once again raising serious concerns about the council's internal controls and oversight of procurement processes?

ANSWER:

Thank you Councillor Keen for your question, KCC as our delivery partner and Highway Authority, oversaw an extensive procurement exercise and awarded the contract to Jackson Civil Engineering formally on 10th January 2025.

Following the contract award, the contractor then reviews and signs the contract, this process has now taken place and due for sealing on Wednesday (2nd April), and it is at that point it goes on the contract register .

The whole process has followed correct contract procedures. We now look forward to the contractor starting onsite on the 7th April.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

4. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Tim Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

Since the Greens took control of the Council in May 2023, the Council has borrowed £28m from the Public Works Loan Board. Would the leader explain, in detail, what the borrowing has been used for, how much has been spent, and the total interest in pounds we'll pay on each of these loans?

ANSWER:

Thank you Cllr Keen for your question.

The Treasury Management Strategy is approved each year by Council alongside the revenue and capital budgets. That was most recently at our last meeting on 26th February, where it was the Treasury Management Strategy at Appendix 7 to the budget, and detailed our borrowings at that moment in full.

The Council use Arlingclose as treasury management advisors to support our financing strategy as part of the capital programme and Treasury Management Strategy. Based on their advice our portfolio is a mixture of short and long-term debt, split between Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), local authority borrowing and internal borrowing.

This financing strategy has been in place for some time. As loans mature it is quite normal for these loans to be renewed, referred to as refinancing.

At 31st March 2023, the Council had total debt of £106.7m of which £15.5m has been refinanced for the Housing Revenue Account and £10m for the General Fund. An additional £2.5m borrowing was taken to finance new HRA capital expenditure, which will be paid towards agreed new Council housing purchases as they come forward, giving a total of £28m borrowing from the PWLB.

So as of the 28 February 2025 the Council's total debt was £109.2m - £2.5m higher than two years ago.

The new PWLB borrowing is almost entirely due to replacing maturing debts from both the PWLB and other lenders on expiry of the existing loans. Our PWLB debt is higher than it was. Our debt to other lenders is lower than it was.

The loans were taken out over various maturity dates ranging from 1 year to 13 years. The total interest expected to be paid is £5.4m over the duration of these loans, but we were of course paying interest on the loans previously in place.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

This page is intentionally left blank