



Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Appendix 1: A Snapshot of our Year 2024-25



Your Cabinet Members



Cllr Jim Martin
Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member
for Otterpool Park and
Planning Policy



Cllr Tim Prater
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Finance and Governance



Cllr Rebecca Shoob
Cabinet Member for Housing and
Homelessness



Cllr Stephen Scoffham
Cabinet Member for Climate,
Environment and Biodiversity



Cllr Jeremy Speakman
Cabinet Member for Assets and
Operations



Cllr Polly Blakemore
Cabinet Member for Transport,
Regulatory Services and Building Control



Cllr Mike Blakemore
Cabinet Member for Community and
Collaboration



Cllr Rich Holgate
Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage,
Tourism and District Economy



Cllr Gary Fuller
Cabinet Member for Resident
engagement and accountability

Leader's Statement

Being the Leader of Folkestone & Hythe District Council for a second year has been a privilege and an absolute honour. Together with fellow councillors and our hard-working council staff we have driven forward service improvements for our residents and made sure that we always have an eye on what the future may bring for the district.

Investing in new homes has been a clear focus during the year. I was delighted to see an agreement reached for provision of affordable housing at the former Shorncliffe Barracks in Folkestone and we look forward to the affordable homes being made available next year on the former Smith's Medical site in Hythe. We sold the Biggins Wood site during the year, and I am very pleased to see that following the council's remediation work, this former derelict site will be providing 77 new affordable homes as well as new jobs and opportunities created by the development of the commercial space alongside.

Working to bring forward the 8,500-home garden town at Otterpool Park is not without its challenges. So, it was good to welcome Homes England to join us at the beginning of 2025 to work in collaboration, bringing the additional skills and expertise necessary to attract the level of investment required to deliver a development of this size.

Our Council's financial position has improved, through a great deal of hard work, some cost cutting and rationalisation of some services. We are a Council that believes in Continuous Improvement rather than dramatic change, and over our four year term we greatly improve the performance of the Council.

I would like to thank the many residents and businesses who took part in our consultation process ahead of preparing a new Corporate Plan for the district. This may have been completing a survey, joining our focus groups or taking the time to talk to those who knocked at doors asking for feedback. As a result of the information we were given, I believe we have come up with an exciting plan for the future of the district and I look forward to its launch later in 2025.

As a Council our focus on the future is shaped by what our residents tell us, so we asked young people for their views on the district they are growing up in. From these conversations, I was absolutely delighted to see the Youth Forum develop. Members will meet twice a year formally to share views on their priorities for the district and small groups have joined us to learn more about local democracy.

During the year we have worked to support our residents faced with the rising cost of living. We have made sure that available support grants have been distributed promptly and we have pulled together all the resources of our extraordinary district to ensure that where there is a need for support, it is met.

Meeting the needs of our housing tenants and leaseholders and making sure that our housing stock is of the highest possible standard have been the drivers of our housing management service. An enormous amount of work had been carried out to reduce the carbon footprint of more than 100 of our homes and make them cheaper to run for our tenants through a range of energy efficient measures.

As leader of the district council, which is a minority coalition, supported on a vote by vote basis by other political groups, I am reassured at the work and actions councillor colleagues from all political groups, and I have been encouraged as we strive to reduce carbon emissions. This is, not only from the council's own estate but also in supporting organisations across the district through, for example, our green grant scheme.

Currently we are in challenging and difficult times, which trouble me greatly as a council leader, for example, development companies going into administration and even some long established Trusts becoming insolvent. The lack of investment by water companies, the reduction in bus services are a great concern, I see personally and hear regularly how residents are struggling to get to work, school or hospital appointments as bus services are reduced.

We also face the prospect of Local Government being reorganised, County Councils and District Councils including ourselves will disappear and local government will be reshaped into Unitary Authorities. I am fully engaged with other Kent Leaders in delivering this process.

Despite the challenges, I know that business optimism is high and there are many opportunities for our businesses, I also know that people enjoy living in our district and the future is looking bright for young people with increased opportunity. I am looking forward to a third year as leader and during the next 12 months we will continue to delivery for our residents.

Cllr Jim Martin

Leader of Folkestone & Hythe District Council



Cllr Jim Martin

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for
Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

Your District - An Overview

Population



111,000 people ► Forecast to increase by **24%**, reaching **135,900** by **2042**, faster than the Kent average

Location



Folkestone to London in just **53 minutes** via High Speed 1 rail line
Folkestone to Calais in **35 minutes** via Eurotunnel (Le Shuttle)
15 minutes away from the UK's largest seaport at Dover

Proportion of businesses in the district economy



13.4% in the tourism sector
12.3% in the knowledge economy
8.7% in the creative sector, growing almost **7%** over the last 5 years
5.2% in food and drink production
4.8% in manufacturing



Folkestone & Hythe District



Visitor economy



4.7m visitors = **£269m** spent in the local area
Supporting **5,045** jobs

Environment



68% agricultural land
16% woodland, open land and water
Kent Downs National Landscape covering **37%** of the district
23 miles of beaches and cliffs
Internationally important habitats at Dungeness
Potential UNESCO Global Geopark status for chalk hills, cliffs and the Channel

Heritage



913 Listed Buildings
65 Scheduled Monuments
21 Conservation Areas
2 Registered Parks and Gardens
1 Protected Wreck Site

Experience the extraordinary

Service Ambition 1

Positive Community Leadership

Our Priorities:

- Improve physical and mental health & wellbeing
- Safer Communities
- Supporting & Empowering our communities

01 Positive Community Leadership in 2024-25

Folkestone & Hythe Youth Forum: A new forum aimed at encouraging young people to get involved in shaping the future of Folkestone & Hythe was launched during the year. The idea was backed at by councillors at meeting of Full Council on 19th February 2025 following the groundwork laid by the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The group will meet in person twice a year to share views on its priorities for the district – enhancing democracy and promoting the importance of local government, the first meeting of the forum took place on 26th February 2025.

Excellence in Volunteering Award Scheme – During Volunteers Week in June 2024, an awards ceremony was held for the first ever EiV awards for the district, to celebrate the valuable contribution that volunteers make day in day out to our local communities. The awards (run by Kent Coast Volunteers in partnership with FHDC) were promoted district wide through social media, posters, contact with voluntary and community sector organisations, businesses, schools, etc. There were a number of categories including Youth, Team and Individual. Nearly 100 nominations were received, and the shortlisted finalists were invited to attend an awards ceremony at The Quarterhouse on 6th June 2024. The event was so well received that it was agreed to continue the awards during 2025/26.

Safer Streets support for nights out: Following funding for the Safer Streets scheme, being awarded earlier this year following a joint bid by the Community Safety Partnership, Kent Police, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner and £271,351.60 being awarded by the Home Office to be spent over the next two years in Folkestone's town centre, the following new measures were introduced as part of the scheme during the year to ensure evenings spent in Folkestone can be better enjoyed by both residents and visitors:

- **Folkestone Connected:** A town centre map project led by the district's Community Safety Partnership, in collaboration with commercial organisations in the town. Visitors will be able to access the map by scanning a QR code included on posters, leaflets and stickers displayed throughout the town centre. The map includes information about nearby taxi ranks, defibrillators and places visitors can go if they feel vulnerable, unsafe or in danger.
- **Taxi Marshall Scheme:** The scheme launched by Community Safety Partnership has been operating since April 2024, has already been successful in supporting vulnerable people to get home safely. The marshalls can be identified by their bright orange vests and work with door staff and various venues to help create a safe environment for everyone out socialising in the town. They are out and about in the town centre between 10.30pm and 3:30am on Friday and Saturday nights.

Supporting the districts most vulnerable residents: In October 2024, the council was recognised for its work in supporting vulnerable residents. At the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV)'s national awards ceremony, the Council Tax, Benefits and Welfare Team were named the winners of the Benefits and/or Welfare Reform Team of the Year and Excellence in Social Inclusion categories. The judges praised a "holistic approach to supporting residents" including an "innovative" collaboration scheme with ReachOut, a private sector service from Sigma Connected, aimed at working with the most vulnerable. The work of "alleviating poverty and deprivation" within targeted groups in the district through the Household Support Fund and Home Essentials Fund was also commended.

District council meeting headed to New Romney: In October 2024, a meeting of Full Council was the first to be held outside of Folkestone for the first time in recent years. The meeting was held at The Marsh Academy in New Romney on Wednesday 2 October at 7pm. Public attendees of the were also able to meet some of the district council's elected members at a special event due to be held at the venue before the main meeting. Moving full council meetings from the Civic Centre to other areas of the district is part of an initiative suggested by Cllr Anita Jones when she was elected council chair in May 2024.

Planning Permission for Coast Drive Project: In June 2024, Plans for a new visitor hub, improved water sports facilities and 93 beach huts at Greatstone have been approved. Permission was granted subject conditions and a S106 agreement, which would guarantee funding for measures for the life of the development to protect the natural environment and the birds that winter nearby including signage and wardens. A 121 space loose-stone surface car park with disabled spaces and electric car charging points is also included.

Drop-in event for Folkestone Sports Centre staff: Following the closure of Folkestone Sports Centre in July 2024, due to the Charity running the centre calling in the administrators, the council hosted a drop in event at the Civic Centre for sports centre staff affected by the closure on 9th August 2024. The staff were able to talk to members of the council's welfare team and guidance was given around sources of assistance. In addition, there was advice on training opportunities, applying for jobs and support offered around interview skills. Staff from the Department of Work and Pensions and East Kent College were also in attendance at the event to give advice.



Council Tax, Benefits and Welfare Team winning at the IRRV National awards ceremony



Excellence in Volunteering Awards celebrates the contribution volunteers make daily in local communities



Plans for a new visitor hub, improved water sports facilities and 93 beach huts at Greatstone were approved in the year

01 Positive Community Leadership in 2024-25

Community Safety Unit: The council's Community Safety Unit (CSU) has worked on the following community initiatives with Folkestone & Hythe Community Safety Partnership (CSP) during the year, including:

- **Community Safety Partnership Annual Event (April 2024):** The event was held at the Quarterhouse in Folkestone was attended by over 65 partner agencies. The Senior Community Safety Officer, along with various partners including Kent Police and KCC, worked on developing the annual strategic assessment to create next year's action plan.
- **Prevent Gaming Bus (April 2024):** Members of the Prevent team have been speaking to pupils at the Folkestone Academy about online safety whilst the children explored the Gaming Bus, where they were joined by colleagues from Community Safety Partnership including Kent Police. They listened to the pupils regarding situations and comments that might make them feel uncomfortable. In addition, they advised the young people on how to keep safe while gaming by only playing with friends and people they know rather than strangers.
- **Safer Streets Initiative (April 2024):** The Community Safety team had a stand located outside Folkestone Town Hall along with the Urban Pastors for the launch of the Safer Streets initiative. The team handed out 50 safety items and highlighted all the resources available. Later on during the evening from 9pm until 1am, the Senior Community Safety Officer along with the council's licensing officers accompanied Kent Police in the town visiting many of the local licensed establishments.
- **Operation Sceptre (May 2024):** Community Safety worked on Op Sceptre a national knife campaign supported by Kent Police to raise awareness about knife crime. At a stall in Folkestone's Bouverie Place Shopping Centre in Folkestone. Caley Walden, Kent Police Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) Co-ordinator, and KCC Wardens highlighted ways of preventing knife crime in our district. The officers engaged with around 30 people about crime and anti-social behaviour.
- **Folkestone Talks (May 2024):** On 20 May, an officer from the Community Safety Unit attended Martello Primary, part of the Turner Schools Group, giving talks and handing out leaflets and safety advice. Folkestone Talks is organised by the Turner Stone Hub which has organised people in the community to speak to the children in their schools. Partners who attended included the Environment Agency, Victim Support, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Migrant Support, Kent Police and district council officers.
- **Summer Well Event (July 2024):** The Community Safety team along with partner agencies came together for the second of a series of the Well events. The Summer Well event was held at the Cheriton Baptist Church. The Rainbow Centre organised a cooking on a budget demonstration during the event using produce available from

their Pantry. The NHS bus was parked at the church where free screening and health checks were carried out on people. Napier Friends provided men's haircuts as well as cooked world foods. The event was represented by many partner agencies including Kent Fire & Rescue, NHS, Kent Police, Rainbow Centre, E.ON Energy and many more with many organisations having stalls where residents came along to speak to representatives from the agencies

- **Summer Safety Events (July/August 2024):** On 31st July and 28th August 2024, Community Safety joined staff from Kent Police Community Liaison, the RSPCA and the Kent County Council warden team at a stand near the Lower Leas Coastal Park amphitheatre in Folkestone and the officers were also present at Radnor Park in Folkestone. The officers engaged with the public about keeping safe during the summer months also provided advice about bike marking, crime and ASB (anti-social behaviour) in the area whilst handing out safety information and items to protect people inside and outside of their homes.
- **Community Safety Partnership Networking Event (December 2024):** A Community Safety Partnership networking event was held at the Civic Centre on 5 December. Around 75 partner agencies attended along with Cllr Polly Blakemore. Representatives from council's housing team and licensing teams attended with those from Al-Anon Family Groups, KCC Adult Social Care, Kent Police, East Coast Volunteering, East Kent Rape Crisis, Centre, Rainbow Centre, Lighthouse 43, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, The Beacon Plus, Kent & Medway Cancer Alliance, KCC Wardens, RSPCA and many more. The event provided an opportunity for partners to liaise and build up their networks with the sharing of information, knowledge and awareness offered.
- **Foord Road South Litter Pick (January 2025):** Responding to complaints Community Safety and Environmental Enforcement colleagues, carried out a litter pick in Foord Road South. Other F&HDC staff helped to improve the environment by cutting back the foliage overhanging the wall on the steps to New Street.
- **Sandgate Road Car Park artworks (February 2025):** Tara Liam from Community Safety and Caley Walden from VRU (Violence Reduction Unit) worked with community projects and organisations to bring together some powerful messages through the power of art. The grey interior of the Sandgate Road car park has been given a new splash of colour thanks to some extraordinary designs recognising many of our important local agencies. A grand unveiling on 25 February was attended by representatives of the agencies which had submitted the including, Kent Police, Kent and Medway VRU, HomeStart Shepway, Folkestone Rainbow Centre, Change Grow Live, United Response's Cheriton Community Network, The Beacon Plus College, Kent County Council's Children's Social care and Folkestone & Hythe District Council.



Community Safety Partnership Annual Event



Operation Sceptre with multi-agency partners



Summer Safety Event in the Coastal Park



Sandgate Road Car Park Artworks

Service Ambition 2

A Thriving Environment

Our Priorities:

- Ensure an excellent environment for everyone
- Grow the circular economy & reduce waste
- Increase our resilience to climate change

Green flag awards: Four of the district's favourite parks and green spaces have continued to fly the Green Flag after retaining their status for 2024/25. The Lower Leas Coastal Park, Kingsnorth Gardens, Radnor Park and the Royal Military Canal have all been recognised with the celebrated award once again. The Green Flag award is the international quality mark for parks and green spaces which display the highest environmental standards, are beautifully maintained and have excellent visitor facilities. All four sites – plus many other areas across the whole district – are lovingly managed by Folkestone & Hythe District Council's hard-working grounds maintenance and property teams all year round.

'Raise the Rate' Recycling Campaign: In August 2024, the council launched a new recycling campaign called 'Raise the Rate' to improve the district's overall recycling rate by encouraging residents to be extra careful about putting the right things in the correct bins. The campaign included the launch of *an A-Z guide for recycling and waste*, as well as a one-stop shop for recycling and waste resources on the council's website. Both resources have been designed to make it simple for residents to find out how best to dispose of their waste. They will be regularly updated with residents' suggestions. There will also be a focus on asking residents to use their "bin-fluence" to share recycling tips with family members, friends and neighbours.

'Ultra Narrow' Route Waste Project: The Waste Team working with the contractors Veolia completed a review of all properties that due to their restricted access are serviced by a special narrow bodied refuse vehicle. As a result of this review, changes were made in September that enabled an additional 600 households to receive a recycling service. Indications are that approximately 200 additional tonnes of recyclable material could be collected in a year, which would contribute 0.5% - 1% to our annual recycling rate.

Food Waste Project: In Autumn 2024, the council working in partnership with KCC undertook a major campaign to promote food waste recycling. In addition to publicising the food service, it also involved stickers being added to bins promoting food waste recycling and a discounted offer to purchase food kerbside caddies. This resulted in a 10% increase in food waste collected for recycling. If sustained this would also contribute a further 1% to our annual recycling rate.

Support to tackle decline in wildlife and plants: In July 2024, the council marked its fifth anniversary of declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency. At a full council meeting that same month backing was given for a nine-point resolution aimed at acknowledging "climate change and biodiversity loss are deeply entwined and neither can be effectively tackled in isolation". Councillors agreed to collaborate further with

partner organisations and communities to enhance measures to build natural resilience and protect endangered wildlife and plants. One notable success has been the emergence of the extremely rare and distinctive pyramidal orchid in an area looked after by the council in Hythe. The area near the Royal Military Canal has been managed for biodiversity for the last four years with two conservation cuts. This year the protected orchids, with their conically-shaped flower heads, have appeared for the first time.

Tree Planting across the district: In November 2024, hundreds of new trees were planted as part of an initiative led by the council's chair (Cllr Anita Jones), who sourced free whips from The Woodland Trust with the intention of improving biodiversity in all four corners of the district. Some 600 were planted in Hythe alone by county, district and town councillors – as well as volunteers from Napier Barracks and the Hythe Civic Society. Other locations for planting, included Dymchurch and New Romney. The planting of new trees coincided with National Tree week and community groups and schools with location suggestions were encouraged to get in touch.

Bicycle parking facilities for residents: Secure bicycle parking facilities have been installed for residents of a Folkestone street during the year. Those living in Clifton Crescent can now take advantage of two new lockable bike hangars introduced as part of a one-year trial. Once signed up, they are guaranteed a bicycle space at all times and will get their own key. The project was led by Kent County Council (KCC) with the full support of the District Council. Each of the bike hangars fit neatly into the footprint of one parked car and, if the trial is successful, it is hoped they can be introduced in other parts of the district.

Princes Parade: A public survey was launched in December 2024 on the future use of the 18 acres of council-owned land at Princes Parade in Hythe. The survey closed on 16th February 2025, where a total of 1,472 responses were received. Of those responding, 64% considered that supporting biodiversity was very important and 51% rated maintaining the current open space as very important.

Coastline Protection works: Bi-Annual recycling and regrading of 142,000 tonnes of shingle took place during the year to help protect more than 3,000 homes and businesses along the coast from flooding. The first phase starting on 15th April 2024, took place between Fisherman's Beach in Hythe and Folkestone Harbour and the second phase commenced on the same stretch of coast on 4th November 2024, both phases taking eight weeks to complete. The approach is currently the most cost-effective way of protecting the district and offers far superior protection than the old timber groynes.



Cllr Martin and Cllr Speakman with the Council's GM Team at Radnor Park, Folkestone for Green flag awarding



Rare and distinctive pyramidal orchid found near the Royal Military Canal in Hythe



Cllr Butcher and Cllr P Blakemore with a new lockable bike hangar in Clifton Crescent, Folkestone

Environmental Protection and Enforcement: The Environmental Protection and Enforcement Team have worked hard during the year to ensure the district remains a clean and tidy place for both residents and visitors. The following work has been undertaken during the year:

- The team have responded to 2,946 complaints and enquiries during this timeframe, with many involving major full-scale investigations.
- Continued to support a wide range of projects ranging from community education and engagement to tackling anti-social behaviour, all while staying on top of our statutory responsibilities. We've issued Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) where needed and taken unpaid cases to court, with successful outcomes. We've also led targeted campaigns in problem areas: tackling dog fouling in the Warren, Coastal Park and East Cliff, addressing dogs off leads on the Leas, and dealing with beach waste during early morning patrols over the summer.
- When concerns were raised on social media about Hawkinge Cemetery, the team responded quickly with increased patrols. The team managed multiple unauthorised encampments and continue to work closely with the Community Safety team on a long-term operation addressing homelessness, anti-social behaviour, and related waste issues. In addition, the team developed and delivered a successful training programme for new officers, helping to prepare the next generation of officers for our team.

Fly tipping: The team have thoroughly investigated a number of fly-tips they encounter across the district, including the following cases:

- A man was regularly disposing of and burning waste on an area of private land in Folkestone, without the landowner's permission, not only causing a nuisance to local residents but also having a significant adverse impact on the environment with the creation of dark smoke. He was interviewed and the prosecuted where he was found guilty of fly-tipping and awarded 80 hours of unpaid work and had to pay a total £464.
- The team have issued 30 (£300) FPNs for fly-tipping alone, including a case involving a resident burning waste from a property renovation, despite having been directly warned and asked not to by officers. Another such case involved a recently closed local business, who decided to empty the contents of the commercial address and into a residential bin store, this was captured on CCTV and the offender traced via their registration number.
- A lady was investigated after a member of the public's CCTV captured her leaving items on the street with no intention of having them removed. She was found guilty of littering and, having failed to pay an FPN, was ordered to pay a total of £256.
- A couple who allowed waste to accumulate in their gardens, to such an extent that it was deemed to be detrimental to the lives of the people in the locality, were served with a Community Protection Notice (CPN). They had ignored warnings and officer attempts to engage and failed to comply with the terms of the CPN. They were prosecuted for this criminal offence and both ordered to pay a total of £764.50.

- **Community Protection Warnings:** The team took firm action by issuing 64 Community Protection Warnings for waste offences, dog control, and unauthorised camping. We also patrolled with the Community Support Team, tackling antisocial behaviour.

Fixed Penalty Notices: the team issued 166 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) during the year, while also managing projects, leading educational initiatives and public campaigns, and maintaining patrols across the district. FPNs were issued for range offences including littering, dogs off lead in designated area, fly tipping and failure to remove dog faeces.

Nuisance investigations: The team have received a number of complaints concerning alleged Statutory Nuisances and 34 formal notices have been issued during the year for issues such as noise nuisance, odour nuisance, building site noise, waste on private property causing a detriment to the community and other waste related offences.

Stray dogs and dog control: The team successfully managed 89 lost dog cases during the period. 60% of the dogs we rescued and kennelled were not reunited with their owners due to lack of microchips, loving new homes were found for these dogs. Through our 'Paws for Thought' roadshow, we engaged the community with several district-wide events focused on dog control zones, the importance of picking up after your dog and how microchipping benefits reunification. To support the public and to try and reduce the number of unidentified dogs, we provided two days of free microchipping services to the public during our events. We have also conducted educational events and engaged with many residents across the district at pop up events. We have focused on dog fouling and utilised various methods (postcards through doors, social media campaigns, survey lance, cameras, early morning patrols, focused project areas) in problematic areas.

Engagement and partnership work: During the year, the team have undertaken engagement and partnership work including:

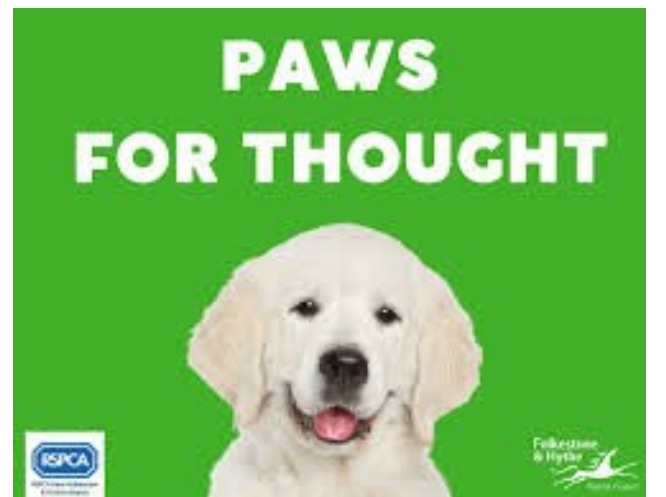
- Partnering with Kent Police and the council's Licensing officers to ensure compliance with taxi and waste carrier licensing regulations in the area.
- Developing new artwork and poles to highlight and promote dog friendly beaches across the district.
- Raising awareness of the 'Paws for Thought' roadshow and attended many community events during the year.
- Continuing to grow cross partnership working with the Community Safety Unit and the Licensing officers on joint areas of work within the district. Joined forces with Kent Police colleagues and to conduct roadside checks on waste carriers and commercial vehicles as well as established good links with Kent County Council with the sharing of information on unauthorised encampments, waste carrier concerns and fly-tipping offences.



Environmental Enforcement Officer on patrol at The Warren, Folkestone



A man burning waste on private land in Folkestone found guilty of fly tipping resulting in a £464 fine.



Paws for Thought Campaign offering advice and support to pet owners.

Service Ambition 3

A Vibrant Economy

Our Priorities:

- Reinvigorate the high streets
- Supporting a vibrant & diverse business community
- Help people access jobs & opportunity
- Grow the skills we need for the future

03 A Vibrant Economy in 2024-25

Folkestone 'A Brighter Future': A major step forward was reached in the Folkestone – A Brighter Future project during the year with a start date for the scheme announced and a planned engagement event. The project will provide a huge boost to the regeneration of Folkestone town centre. Work will begin on the scheme on Monday 7 April 2025 and is due to finish in Summer 2026. A public engagement event was held at Folkestone town hall from 10am to 6pm on Friday 4 April and 10am to 3pm on Saturday 5 April. The final designs for the scheme were on display as well as more detail about the various planned phases of work. A virtual reality (VR) experience was also available for people to try out what walking through the finished scheme will be like and partners from the project will be on hand to answer any queries.

Market Trials in Folkestone: A host of new trial markets popped up in Folkestone town centre during Summer 2024 as part of the Folke About Town series and the wider market improvement programme in the town. Guildhall Street and Sandgate Road were lined with stalls selling a mix of food, art and more at the following events:

- **Folkestone Street Market:** This enhanced version of the regular Saturday market on Sandgate Road will include stalls selling food, pre-loved clothes, art and crafts. There will be a bar, seating and music for the public to enjoy the atmosphere in the town centre. The street market traded on 24th August and 5th October 2024.
- **Art market:** The art market saw independent local artists from all genres selling their wares along Guildhall Street that traded on 14th September 2024.
- **Continental market:** A market of tasty cheeses and cured meats that traded on Sandgate Road on 19th, 21st and 22nd September 2024.

New Green Grant Scheme: More than £200,000 has been set aside by Folkestone & Hythe District Council to support sustainability projects cutting carbon emissions, enhancing social cohesion and helping nature and wildlife. The new Green Grant Programme was approved by cabinet members on Wednesday (22 January) and will be open to a wide range of organisations including community groups, schools, parish and town councils, charities and small businesses. The scheme builds on the success of a previous council grant scheme for businesses and will offer up to 80% of a project's cost with small groups able to apply for a micro grant of up to 100%. There will be four categories offering grants of up to £1,000, £10,000, £15,000 and £20,000 with the programme open for applications from February 2025.

Encouraging more visitors to the district: In February 2025, A new tourism campaign aimed at attracting even more visitors to our amazing district has gone

live this week ahead of further exciting plans for 2025. The folkestoneandhythe.co.uk website has undergone a makeover showcasing the best of what this corner of the world has to offer both inland and along its 26-mile coastline. A multi-channel campaign - with a nod to activities that can also be enjoyed out of season. And once people have arrived, a new map of Folkestone – created by a local illustrator – will help guide them to attractions and trails across the town. It has been distributed to local attractions and hotels and is also available on the website to inspire potential tourists. New maps of Hythe and Sandgate, as well as Romney Marsh, are also being created and will be made available later this year.

Support for rural businesses and communities: Funding from the government's Rural England Prosperity Fund has been distributed to local authorities across the country to support capital projects put forward by businesses and community organisations. In the twelve months from January 2024, a total of £362,868 was distributed to 22 schemes in the district to help address challenges in rural communities and furthering green objectives. Projects included:

- Installation of an eco-friendly waste food oil system for a Hythe brewing company
- Creating a cycle shelter at Elham Village Hall to encourage people to cycle to meetings and events
- Funding for the first two phases of a 3G football pitch at The Marsh Academy in New Romney
- Construction of a workshop to help a natural-based skincare products business in Stowting
- Building a new village hall in St Mary in the Marsh
- Expansion of the 5G wireless broadband network on Romney Marsh.

Engagement with Local schools: During the year the council has engaged positively with local schools to support pupils to access jobs, both at the Council and beyond. We have produced a short video and worksheet on interview techniques for local young people and distributed this via schools, colleges and the Family Hub. We have worked with the Beacon school running practice interview sessions and delivered a workshop on interview skills for Year 10 pupils at Folkestone School for Girls. We have run careers events at The Marsh Academy, Folkestone School for Girls, Folkestone College, and at the Council (attended by Folkestone College, William Harvey Grammar School and Birchwood School). We also had a stand at the Romney Marsh Inspires careers event for the Marsh Academy and The Lighthouse. In addition to this, we supported the drop in event for former Folkestone Sports Centre employees providing advice on training opportunities, applying for jobs and interview skills.



Artist impression of Bouverie Square as part of the wider regeneration relating to the 'Folkestone -A Brighter Future' project



A new tourism campaign aimed at attracting even more visitors to our amazing district



Expansion of 5G wireless broadband on Romney Marsh thanks to the support of the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Service Ambition 4

Quality Homes and Infrastructure

Our Priorities:

- Improve outcomes & support for homeless people
- Deliver sustainable, affordable housing
- Deliver a safe, accountable housing service
- Digital inclusion & connectivity
- Deliver a sustainable new development at Otterpool Park

04 Quality Homes and Infrastructure in 2024-25

Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards success for Housing team: In September 2024, the council's housing team won an award for leading a decarbonisation project to improve the energy efficiency of council-owned homes. The Asset and Social Housing Decarbonisation staff were judged to be a top team at the Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards winning the Asset Management category against stiff competition. The Folkestone team led the multi-million pound project to help keep tenants warm in winter and cool in the summer. Work included the installation of measures such as: cavity wall, under floor and loft insulation, ventilation, double-glazed windows, new external doors, high heat retention storage heaters, as well as the installation of air source heat pumps and solar PV panels, which will help tenants save on their energy costs. . The projects included the retrofit of the former office building Ross House, Folkestone and turning it into the council's first 'net-zero', enabled residential block.

Approval for green new homes in Hythe: Twenty-six new homes are to be provided in Hythe as part of the council's pledge to provide more affordable, energy efficient homes in the district. The homes are to be built in Boundary Road (on the former Smiths medical site) and will be 14 one -bedroom flats, six two- bedroom flats, three houses with two bedrooms and three with three bedrooms. The twenty new flats will be let to tenants on the council's housing list at affordable rents and the six new houses will be available for shared ownership. The new homes will be available in 2026. The apartment buildings and houses are part of the Sutherland Park development being built by Roddy New Homes and will be 100% fossil fuel-free with air source heat pumps and solar panels.

Commitment to green, affordable homes: Nine new council homes have been purchased as part of an ongoing commitment to provide affordable, energy efficient homes .The properties are located at Middlesex House, Arras Close, Folkestone and were purchased by the council through an affordable housing planning agreement. The flats are highly insulated, heated via air source heat pumps, and have communal solar panels installed to provide low-cost electricity to tenants. As a result, each flat has been awarded an A (most efficient) Energy Performance Certificate. They have been let to tenants on the council's housing list at affordable rents. The council also purchased a further five homes in the development, which were made available for shared ownership purchase last year. All are currently occupied.

Social housing decarbonisation project success (Wave one): In May 2024, the council announced that 125 of council-owned homes had been brought up to date

with a range of energy efficient measures making them cheaper to run for tenants. Measures such as insulation, solar panels, and heating upgrades have been fitted to the homes which were most in need of the upgrades and tenants are already seeing their household bills reducing. The work was paid for by the council partially match funding a grant from Wave 1 of central government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and was completed in March 2024. Wave 1 has already seen the project decrease the total CO2 emissions of 125 properties by just under 295 tonnes per year, which is the equivalent to approximately 1.3 million miles of driving or 500 passengers' roundtrip flights to Munich.

Social housing decarbonisation project (Wave 2.1): A further 120 council-owned homes were brought up to date during the year with a range of energy efficient measures which will help tenants manage their energy bills. Measures such as insulation, solar panels, and air source heat pumps have been installed where appropriate with the work being paid for by the council partially match funded with a grant from Wave 2.1 of central government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). The first phase of 2.1 was completed in December 2024 and work on phase two of Wave 2.1 is already in progress, with the council set to improve the energy efficiency of a further 180 of its homes in 2025. In total 425 council homes will benefit from the project.

Purchase of affordable homes at Risborough Barracks: In October 2024, Cabinet members approved the purchase of 44 properties at Risborough Barracks, secured with the planning consent obtained for the site in Shorncliffe and funded by the council's Housing Revenue Account. The homes will be let to applicants on the council's housing list through Kent Homechoice once they are completed. A mixture of properties for affordable rent and shared ownership will be made available. The council is also ensuring all of the homes will receive energy efficiency upgrades, delivered to EPC rating B, to keep costs down for residents – as well as support the authority's carbon emission reduction strategy.

No use empty scheme: In February 2025, a building which was left to decay for nearly two decades has been refurbished thanks to the support of a council initiative. Five new flats have been created in the five-storey town house located in Augusta Gardens, Folkestone, following three years of work by Browns Construction – backed by the No Use Empty scheme. Now in its twentieth year, the Kent County Council-led programme helps fund the renewal of derelict properties by bringing them back into residential use. Folkestone & Hythe District Council was one of its founding partners and, in 2014, introduced top up loans to help tackle some of the



Housing Award for leading a decarbonisation project to improve the energy efficiency of council-owned homes.



Approval of 26 new green homes to be built at Boundary Road in Hythe



Cllr Shoob with the council's housing officers at the opening of nine new green council homes at Arras Close,

Win Pine House heat metering project: During the year, the council invested over £1 million in a project to upgrade the heating and lighting at Win Pine House, one of our Independent Living (sheltered housing) schemes in Hythe. All 44 flats in Win Pine House, plus all communal areas, are heated via a communal boiler. There had been several issues with the heating and hot water at Win Pine House over the last couple of years, caused not by the boiler, but by the pipework leading from the boiler to tenants' individual flats and to the communal areas. The project involved installing new pipework throughout the building and fitting a Heat Interface Unit (HIU) in all flats. These HIUs transfer heat from the communal boiler to each tenant's flat, allowing them to have full control of their heating.

Assisting People Who Are Rough Sleeping: An entrenched rough sleeper for a number of years, the client had been very reluctant to receive support around housing. Engagement was often sporadic despite numerous offers of support. The Outreach Team began working constructively with the client in March 2024. After a couple of months the Outreach Team built a rapport with the client which led to the acceptance of help with housing. With some perseverance, the client was able to access the winter shelter where engagement improved. We used the Target Priority Group funding from the government to secure a one-bedroomed flat, and the client moved in soon after. Initially the client struggled to adjust to being indoors but is now very happy in the property and has regained independence.

Tenant scrutiny review of anti-social behaviour: During the year, the housing service introduced a new anti-social behaviour policy and to help us ensure we got it right, our tenant-led Scrutiny Panel chose to conduct a review of the housing service's approach to anti-social behaviour (ASB). Their review resulted in the following changes to our policy that included:

- Wording added to explain that we will take extra care when dealing with ASB in Independent Living.
- Explaining that while we always deal with reports of ASB in confidence, we will make it clear to the person who is reporting it that we cannot guarantee anonymity as the person causing the ASB may be able to draw their own conclusions.
- Examples of the types of things we consider ASB and those which we don't. We also included this information in our January 2025 tenant newsletter.

Council Tenants and Leaseholders Annual Gardening Competition: Blooming marvellous council tenants and leaseholders have been recognised for their outstanding efforts at the annual gardening competition. The event is run and managed by Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel (STAP) members Gillian Jenkins and Sharon Gasson, both of whom also judge the event. Despite challenging weather during the year, green-fingered tenants and leaseholders in the district have braved the rain and cold to nurture their beloved gardens. The stunning green spaces submitted by F&HDC tenants and leaseholders were visited in July 2024 and

certificates and prizes were given to the winners in August 2024. The prizes were donated by sponsors Mears, Swale Heating, Grovewell Garden Centres, Folkestone & Hythe District Council grounds maintenance team, Cllr David Godfrey and Cllr Jim Martin. The Judges were incredibly impressed by the standard of entries, with particular praise being given to the increase in entrants for the communal and community garden category this year.

Affordable homes and employment space for Biggins Wood: In the absence of private sector interest, the 10-acre plot at Biggins Wood was bought by the council in 2017 to help deliver much-needed affordable homes and employment space. With the support of a central government grant, remediation work was undertaken to make the site ready for a development partner to take it forward. It has now been sold to Wickhambreaux Developments Ltd, who will deliver 5,600sqm of commercial units. Orbit Homes, partnering with Chartway, will build the 77 new homes for social rent and shared ownership. The homes will be all-electric and designed to minimise their environmental impact. Once completed, the social rented homes will be made available for local people on the council housing list.

Homes England collaboration agreement to bring forward Otterpool Park: In December 2024, the council's Cabinet agreed to enter a collaboration agreement with Homes England, the government's housing and regeneration agency to support the delivery of Otterpool Park. This six-month agreement will give the council access to the additional skills and expertise necessary to attract the level of investment required to deliver a development the size of Otterpool Park.

Net zero pathway at Otterpool Park: In February 2025, A proposal aimed at providing sustainably sourced energy for new homes and businesses planned at Otterpool Park was approved by Folkestone and Hythe councillors. The council's Cabinet supported the "pathway to net zero" by agreeing that a renewable energy company take on the role of bringing forward a sustainable power supply scheme and obtaining the necessary planning consents. The proposal from SNRG to create on-site electricity generation via roof-top solar and a solar park with battery storage, all connected via a smart grid. It is estimated that 50% of the average annual demand of the 8,500 homes planned for the new town could be generated on site with the remainder coming from suppliers of renewable energy via the national grid making the new town net zero in operation. The company will fund, own and operate the solar park and its connection to the smart grid. It will also remain fully accountable for servicing the investment, delivery, performance, compliance, customer satisfaction and all financial transactions. The council will have no ongoing financial liability.



Collaboration with Homes England on bringing forward new homes at Otterpool Park was agreed in the year.



The Biggins Wood site in Folkestone will see new affordable homes and employment space delivered.



Tenant with an award for her front garden as part of the annual gardening competition managed by STAP.