

Council – 1 April 2026
Agenda item 9 (Portfolio Holder reports)

1. Report of Councillor J Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

Otterpool Park

Otterpool Park is at a critical stage and I am currently limited in what I can say because of commercial sensitivity.

We are convening several Otterpool Park meetings in the coming weeks and months, the Otterpool Park Owners meeting, the Otterpool Park Working Group and I intend to hold an update/briefing meeting for all members.

I am continuing to meet regularly with MP's, KCC, neighbouring District Council Leaders, Homes England, Developers, Consultants and representatives of the 5 parishes that come together on Otterpool.

The Otterpool team continue to meet regularly with Homes England. Amongst many other things we are finalising our Planning Collaboration Agreement. We are in communication with the Government at a high level.

The planning application to build the Waste Water Treatment Works has been validated by KCC, but progress is painfully slow. We are in discussions with our neighbours Ashford and Canterbury with regard to reducing the impact of Phosphates and Nitrates into the River Stour, the Waste Water Treatment Works will clean the water in the Stour as it passes through Otterpool.

Planning Policy

There are a number of large scale applications that are either in the pre-application or application stage, and the Strategic Sites team continues to work proactively with applicants to improve the sense of place, quality of layout, landscaping and architecture.

The very important work on Design Codes with our East Kent colleagues continues.

Planning Team have been working on a Development Update newsletter to inform residents about what is happening on some of the key sites whilst also highlighting the development proposals we have in the district and our open for business proactive approach to working with developers.

Work also continues on the annual Community Infrastructure Levy Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS). The IFS identifies infrastructure needs, infrastructure costs and anticipated funding from developer contributions and how we intend to spend these contributions to improve infrastructure across the district.

The planning team are working hard to produce our new local plan under the new system introduced by the 2023 Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act. We've been undertaking background evidence work on the submitted sites while waiting for the government to publish detailed regulations and guidance.

The planning policy team are continuing to work on the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HEELA). The team are assessing the sites that were submitted to us for consideration during the two 'calls for sites' that were held earlier this year.

The planning team have a number of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) with applicants, which, whilst we had previously outsourced these to external consultants, we are now dealing with in-house. PPAs are a project management tool to help resource planning applications and deal with them in a timely manner – whilst working with applicants.

2. Report of Councillor Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

Over recent weeks I have attended:

- 10th March F&P Sub-Committee [listening to members views]
- 18th March Audit and Governance Committee [listening to members views, Internal and External Audit, including on the very challenging audit timetable for this year]

...and at time of writing, the following are events yet to happen:

- 25th March Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Charity & Cabinet
- 26th March Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Council Joint Committee

Thank you to all that were involved in scrutinising, commenting on, feeding into and then debating and passing our budget on 25 February.

The work on replacing the Council's finance system is now in the final approach phase. Finance should be going fully live on the new system on 1st April, and the rest of the Council on the 7th. All migration, testing and back checking that has gone on over the last nine months seems to be delivering a remarkable result: an IT project being delivered to spec, on time and even a little under budget (at time of writing, but genuinely nothing is being counted on yet, and the next 2 or 3 weeks will be critical!).

I can't begin to say how remarkable it is for the Finance Team to be able to deliver this alongside the "usual business" of the Council. It is a huge piece of work that had high risk and high potential impact (and cost) if it went wrong. That it is still on track feels impressively like watching someone change the engine on a Formula 1 car while it's still moving... As ever: thank you Alan, Jonathan and team.

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

In March, I attended the launch of the Kent Marmot Coastal Region project to address health inequalities in Dover. Including a keynote speech from Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director of the Institute of Health Equity, the event highlighted the stark differences between non-coastal and coastal districts in the county.

For example, when it comes to life expectancy at birth, men in Sevenoaks can expect to live four years longer than those in Folkestone & Hythe (82.3 years versus 78.3) and women 2.3 years longer (85.3 versus 83 years).

Sadly, these aren't the only indicators that the health of people in our district is poorer than it could or should be – for example, above average levels of obesity and diabetes – and we must do what we can to address these and support others to do so.

I have been working on our expanded programme of community grants, due to go to the next Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and am proposing we support increased opportunities for sport and other activity. This district has significantly lower levels of physical activity among adults than all but one other district in Kent (Gravesham) – 62% compared with the 68% Kent average and 67% England average. That's why I also back the council's support for getting Folkestone's swimming pool open again this summer and I was pleased to have a tour of Folkestone Sports Centre to hear direct from its new owners, The Sports Trust, about their exciting plans.

Of course, physical activity is only part of the picture. February saw the Good Food Retail project, led by Kent County Council, get under way. Seven convenience stores in east Folkestone and one in the town centre are now stocking healthier products and providing leaflets to customers to encourage healthy eating. Support for the retailers will continue.

I attended an update event in February for the Neighbourhood Health Pioneer Programme being piloted in our district.

In March, I was at County Hall for a meeting of Kent Health & Wellbeing Board, then a workshop (following an earlier online one to one session) aimed at making the Board more effective in addressing challenges such as health inequalities.

Excitement has been growing over the possibility of Folkestone becoming the UK's first Town of Culture. Almost 100 organisations took part in workshops at the Leas Cliff Hall in February to help shape the expression of interest for the competition. I attended the visioning workshop and other meetings to discuss this.

I opened another of our very successful networking events in February, this time in Hythe, which help to connect community organisations. I also spoke at the opening of our armed forces event in March hosted by Folkestone Nepalese Community Centre – the first event of its kind - which also connected organisations and will help ensure that those who have served their country get the help and support they deserve.

Community organisations rely upon volunteers and I attended a planning meeting for this year's Excellence in Volunteering Awards, which will recognise many of them at a celebration on 4 June, during Volunteering Week. The deadline for nominations – 17 April – is fast approaching. For more information and to nominate a group or individual, please visit Kent Coast Volunteering: <https://www.kcv.org.uk/folkestone-hythe-district-excellence-in-volunteering-awards-2026/>

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

Kent's Enhanced Partnership Board is chaired by KCC's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport. Its membership is made up of KCC senior officers with responsibility for public transport and representatives of bus service operators. This body met in late February to agree the submission of the proposed delivery plan for 2026/2027 Bus Grant Funding for Kent to the Department for Transport. As I reported last month, a large proportion of the allocated revenue funding is already earmarked to support existing services and to prevent the cost of school bus passes from escalating yet further. This leaves approximately £2m for service enhancements across Kent. I am working with local bus users and MP Tony Vaughan to make the case for improvements to our urban and rural bus network, and in particular public transport links to the William Harvey hospital.

I am still chasing an up-to-date list of Highway Improvement Plans across our district from KCC. More on that once I have received it. Via our Joint Transportation Board with KCC, and along with other Councillors, I have been pushing for the Road Safety Audit for the (now not-so) new junction near Tesco's at the western end of Cheriton High Street. The audit has now been completed, highlighting some issues which may require remediation works and we await the designer's response.

The public consultation on the renewed CPZ framework is now complete and the protocol will be considered by Cabinet on 25th March.

Two statutory consultations are currently underway to protect parking for residents:

1. To extend the current seasonal At Any Time restrictions, on the Parade and Coast Drive in Greatstone and Lydd, to all year and to introduce additional At Any Time restrictions.
2. To limit parking to permit holders only in the summer months in Radnor Cliff and the lower section of Radnor Cliff Crescent at the western end of the coastal park in Folkestone.

Also in parking:

- During April, bodycams will be distributed to all our civil enforcement officers in the interests of their personal safety
- KCC are progressing with their on-street EV charge point scheme with a statutory consultation, which will identify their proposed locations across our district, due to take place this Spring. There is still time to feed in your suggestions [here](#)
- Parking enforcement patrols will be stepped up for the summer season as of April
- Local Authorities are to be given enhanced powers to take action against drivers who cause an obstruction by parking on the pavement, via secondary legislation due to be passed in Autumn of this year

I will be chairing the first Licensing Forum of 2026 on 31st March. These sessions provide an opportunity for businesses, residents, the police and FHDC to come together in a collaborative setting to share best practice and discuss community challenges and opportunities. Elsewhere in Licensing, alongside their ongoing responsibilities, the team are revamping the taxi information webpages and are shortly to embark on a project focused on the issue of gambling, in particular gaming machines.

I continue to support the White Cliffs Community Rail Partnership and am thrilled to report that the Resident Platform Project at Folkestone West station, in collaboration with Strange Cargo, was shortlisted for a Community Rail award. I even made an artistic (?) contribution to this.

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

Information Governance and Complaints

Data for February 2026 shows that we are continuing to perform exceptionally well, remaining on target for the month and year-to-date across all indicators. Our response rates for FOI/EIR requests reached 99% in February, and we maintained a perfect 100% on-time closure rate for SARs and DPA requests. While there were no serious data breaches reportable to the ICO, we did record three potential minor breaches during the month. On the complaints front, we received 20 new cases in February and closed 95% of all complaints on time, successfully meeting our 95% target. We also received 3 housing service complaints, all of which were closed on time.

Customer Services

The Customer Access Point (CAP) has seen a significant 19% reduction in visits year-to-date compared to 24/25, with under 400 visits recorded in February. However, we are seeing an increasing trend in threatening behaviour. To address this, we are exploring bespoke training for our front-line staff.

Regarding phone interactions, we achieved a fantastic 98.31% call answer rate in February, with an average wait time of just 51 seconds. This is a massive improvement over the 2024-25 average wait time of over 3 minutes. The shift to digital interactions is evident, with a 14% year-to-date reduction in call volumes.

Information Technology and Digital

We continue to drive system improvements, including the recent award of our Cyber Essentials Certificate. We are working to provide more mobile devices to support offline form completion for Grounds Maintenance. The work to digitize historic Building Control applications is set to begin in April, and we are in the final stages of testing new recycling and waste systems.

We are also exploring a possible AI phone trial that would integrate with our website while still allowing residents to speak with an officer if needed. We are currently drafting summary and "easy read" versions of our Customer Access and Digital & ICT strategies to ensure our public-facing documents are accessible to everyone.

Cyber Security

Our Secure Operations Centre (SOC) continues to provide robust protection, successfully averting 100% of critical cyber incidents this year. We are now looking to extend our SOC contract to include enhanced incident response and containment. Furthermore, we are making great progress on our Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) actions, with many key objectives regarding risk management and strategy already marked as complete.

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

Folkestone – A Brighter Future

Construction is progressing well, with the project over 50% complete. Work continues with the bus shelter provider to confirm delivery and installation dates for the permanent living-roof shelters. Several permanent shelters have been installed with temporary stops removed. Planting for some of the completed new bedding areas is expected to be done within the next couple of weeks. The canopy of the bus station building is expected to be removed by the end of April to support the works which have begun on Bouverie Square.

FABF - Creative Folkestone Art Installations

Monster Chetwynd's Playpark

- **Phase 1 (complete):** Following meetings with Creative Folkestone and the artist, KOMPAN are exploring the Grandville-inspired 'double-headed creature' as the preferred direction. This concept offers the best imaginative play value and a strong vertical visual impact. KOMPAN is exploring the inclusion of two structures to enhance the site's storytelling.
- **Phase 2 (in progress):** The design brief has been refined to include approximate equipment footprints and height limits. FHDC is currently conducting a risk assessment to determine fencing requirements. The brief is now with the Variant Team for a 30-day period to develop engineered sketches and initial costing.

Celine Condorelli

- Designs for the banners were well-received, and work is now underway to add wayfinding elements. Locations for the flags are secured for the Guildhall Street and footbridge installations. FHDC and Creative Folkestone are currently evaluating final site options for the remaining group of three flags.

Mole Map

- Using the original artwork as a foundation, FHDC is defining a red-line boundary to create a scaled version of the map. The bus station building in Bouverie Square has been identified as the preferred location for this installation.

UK Town of Culture 2028

In February we held an engagement event at the Leas Cliff Hall about the competition to be UK Town of Culture 2028. Despite the short notice, over 90 individuals and organisations participated, collaborating to help shape our Expression of Interest. The EoI has to be submitted by 31 March, and we expect to hear whether we're through to the next round later in the spring.

Folca Redevelopment

Folca 2, Phase 1 - creating a weather-tight building and strip out work

Phase 1 is progressing well following the appointment of AW Construction (a Folkestone-based company) as the main contractor. Improvement works, including the separation from Folca 1, should finish by the end of August 2026 (Press release: [Giving a historic building an exciting future | Folkestone & Hythe District Council](#))

Folca 2, Phase 2 - work to develop a design for the future occupancy of the building

Phase 2 of the Folca programme received Cabinet approval on 11 February, after which a tender for a lead designer was published, with the aim to appoint by the end of April. Work continues on the occupancy strategy, which includes a medical centre and mixed-use occupation of the lower floors (Press release: [Positive steps forward for Folca | Folkestone & Hythe District Council](#))

Folca 1 – Disposal

The sale of Folca 1 is progressing well. The legal pack has been shared with the buyer's solicitor, with exchange expected eight weeks later. Completion will happen once Folca 1 and 2 are separated, estimated for August 2026 (Press release: [Folca 1 goes on sale | Folkestone & Hythe District Council](#))

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The FHDC regeneration team are supporting 'The High Street Experts' consultancy in delivering the UKSPF-funded business skills programme through April 2026. The programme features two strands:

- *High Street Connect*: supporting retail and hospitality growth in town centres.
- *Grow Rural*: supporting makers and farm diversifications in rural areas.

Highlights of the programmes:

- Over 50 businesses are receiving 1-to-1 support following extensive district-wide promotion.
- Sessions in Folkestone, Hythe, and New Romney are seeing high attendance (up to 25 per session) covering AI, digital presence, and business resilience. The consultants had a record attendance of 25 last week and have been averaging around 14 attendees consistently.
- The initiative is successfully driving SME productivity, digital innovation and inclusive growth across urban and rural sectors.

Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) 2025–26

Ten further expressions of interest have been received, making a total of 36 to date. Several have not met the criteria to invite a full application, due to the project type or location being ineligible.

Eight applications have been approved to date, including funding of £8,700 for the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership to provide new signage and mapping for the Romney Marsh Visitors Centre in New Romney. A total of £59,774 has been allocated. Four new applications are being considered at decision panels, with a potential grant allocation of £35,000. Six other applications are in the pipeline. We are on target to meet or exceed the annual target of ten approvals.

Town Centre Operating Model

The new “Town Centre Operating Model” is designed to bring life and activity to the transformed town centre, including through markets and live events, and a Town Centre Officer will be recruited to lead the project.

Economic Strategy

Regeneration Officers are collaborating with Lichfields to produce a comprehensive economic appraisal and a 3-year sustainable growth plan for the district.

- Baseline data collection is mostly complete, informed by 1:1 stakeholder sessions, workshops, and a district-wide resident and business survey,
- Dedicated workshops were held with the Romney Marsh Partnership Board in early March to identify specific regional challenges and opportunities.
- To date, the team has captured feedback from over 250 people and contacted 80 industrial estate businesses. Outreach has spanned schools, colleges and parish & town councils.
- An insights company will facilitate focus groups and workshops at the end of March, specifically targeting Folkestone Community Forum, North Downs Forum and industrial estate feedback.
- Officers are scheduled to meet with the Youth Forum w/c 23rd March.

Romney Marsh Partnership – The Nest

Since launching, The Nest has continued to expand its offer to the local community and visitor economy by delivering a varied and inclusive programme of events and activities. Key developments include:

- Establishment of a café and retail space showcasing products from local artisans and makers.
- Regular weekly community meetups, including Crochet & Craft sessions, Creative Needle Felting, Artist talks, Yoga classes, Dementia “Hug in a Mug” sessions, Carers' support groups, and grief support groups.
- ‘Winter's End’, an art exhibition held in January, which showcased local artists from across the Marsh.
- Reopening of the former Art Shack later in the spring as ‘The Branch’, which will host community activities and be available for group and business hire.
- Collaboration with the Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership to develop family-oriented events.
- Several improvements have been made to enhance visitor access, visibility, and operational capacity in preparation for increased school visits and visitor numbers expected in spring 2026.
- The Nest has reinstated its seven-day-a-week opening hours following the winter schedule revision.

Tourism

Our “shoulder season” campaign is now well underway. A series of short form videos has been released online, including ‘Winter in the Romney Marsh’, ‘Half term activities’, ‘A Day out in Folkestone’. Additional videos will include a focus on Hythe and Art. Initial engagement figures look strong (full results due the first week of May). The accompanying competition had fantastic uptake with over 450 entries. Our winner lives in London and is currently liaising with the participating local businesses to arrange her prizes.

Our first newsletters for the European market have been published by the National Coastal Tourism Association for us (Dutch and German), and our Timeout newsletter released in February saw very strong engagement levels. The new North Downs tourism map is now printed and in use.

Work continues with local businesses on sustainable tourism. A workshop is to take place to identify sustainability aims and ambitions locally within Tourism. A workshop on the Geo Park bid has taken place and we’re currently awaiting the output and recommendations from the day.

High Streets Fund

Spring Market: The final 'Folke about Town' market is scheduled for 28th March, curated by Kent Food Hubs, with stalls already fully booked.

'Nineteen' will be a new town centre food and community hub at 19 Guildhall Street, operated by Kent Food Hubs under a 10-year lease, creating a lively, welcoming space that supports local producers, strengthens the local food economy, and brings people together through food, skills, culture, and connection. The project, which is supported by UKSPF funding, has four pillars:

1. Business Incubation - a 'Test Lab' for startups.
2. Community Anchor - hot-desking, childcare, and a 'click and collect' service.
3. Food Sustainability - local produce hubs.
4. Cultural Destination - a café/bar model for daytime and evening economy growth.

The venue will also serve as the physical base for the Town Centre Officer.

Heritage Strategy

Officers are now considering the priorities identified in the Heritage Strategy. There are two priorities which Officers are focusing on. The first is to create and maintain a Local List of heritage assets (those buildings that do not have national protection, such as Listed Buildings, but which are special to the local community). The second is to further develop the website to support cultural heritage groups across the district by establishing a list of interest groups and promoting heritage activities across the district.

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

UNESCO Cross Channel Geopark bid

Together with council officers and interested local businesses and groups, I attended a seminar on sustainable tourism organised by the by the French and English geopark team at Le Vast near Boulogne a few weeks ago. Sustainable tourism is one aspect of geopark status and the opportunity to celebrate and promote the unique geological heritage of our region and Nord Pas de Calais is not to be missed. There are only five geoparks in the world which cross international borders and, if the bid for the Anglo-French geopark is approved, it will be the first ever that links countries across a sea. The outcome of the bid for the UNESCO Cross Channel Geopark, which was submitted last November, may well be announced later this year, and could considerably enhance the status of our district.

Beach management

Work to maintain the shingle along the beach in the Sandgate area began in early March and should be completed shortly. This is part of a regular bi-annual programme which builds up defences against flooding and is funded from 2025-2030 by a £2.35 million grant from the Environment Agency. Although the system had never been fully tested, storm Gorette brought a freak weather event to this area of coastline in January, covered the A259 in shingle and damaged beach huts and breakwaters. The defences protect 3000 houses and businesses from flooding and the fact that there was no flooding or injuries shows that they were effective. In the years to come, as climate change brings increasingly severe storms, building resilience to withstand unusual events is going to be ever more important.

Recycling and waste management

At the moment the district recycling rate is broadly in line with previous years, but we are working hard to promote the 'Raise the Rate' campaign and break the elusive 50:50 barrier. In response to increasing amounts of packaging linked to online purchases, we are continuing to supply additional back boxes for paper and card at a discounted rate. So far around 700 have been purchased. From 1st April we will be able to recycle tetra packs (juice cartons) and they can go in the purple bins. We see this as an opportunity for a wider campaign to increase the volume and weight of recycled material. Meanwhile, the electrical waste recycling initiatives run by community groups in Folkestone and Hythe continue to flourish. Finally, the Great British Spring Clean' poster competition is being run again this year during the Easter holidays so please do draw attention to this if you have the chance. Entrants must be under 18 and the deadline for submissions is 25th April.

Folkestone SDG District

The newly adopted Corporate Plan 2025-30 'Our District: Our World' is framed around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These goals have been agreed by every nation in the world and are designed to be supported and implemented by grass roots action. The way that the Folkestone Hythe District is supporting this global plan for the future will be evident in the reports on the progress in delivering the Corporate Plan action points. Presenting our area as an SDG district is a good example of how the council can fulfil a leadership role on environmental issues.

8. Report of Councillor Jeremy Speakman, the Cabinet Member for Waste and Street cleansing and Corporate Health & Safety

Waste and Street Cleansing

- Ongoing liaison with the public and the Waste Management Team to ensure that day-to-day issues and complaints from the public relating to refuse collection and street cleansing are promptly addressed.
- Ongoing review of current waste management and collection arrangements to ensure maximum efficiency and value for money for residents.
- Ongoing liaison with enforcement and Waste Management Team to resolve fly tipping issues.
- Regular liaison meetings and support to local groups such as Hythe Environmental Community Group, Go Folkestone and Romney Marsh Litter Pick Watch to promote their valuable contribution to the Circular Economy through such initiatives as e-waste recycling scheme.
- The Waste Management Team continues to work on the 'Raise the Rate' campaign and other campaigns.
- Veolia continues to perform very well in terms of low rates of missed bins, operating well within the contract standard of less than 50 misses per 100,000 collections.
- The council received the second instalment of the Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility Funding around £344k, making the total received just over £1M for the year so far with a final instalment due at the end of March. This will contribute to the cost of running the recycling service and provide an incentive to further promote recycling.
- As previously advised, there are several Waste projects being prepared or already underway in 2026. This includes work on the next tender and extending food and general recycling to all communal properties, and preparing for what I expect will be another busy summer in terms of visitor numbers.
- In February, I was invited by our waste contractor Veolia to visit the Ross Way Depot to see it in operation. I attended with the Leader and Cllr Scoffham and met with Veolia's local management and then completed a tour of the site. We discussed a wide range of issues including implementation of the Simpler Recycling proposals, the impact of LGR, and social value initiatives planned for this year. Later, we were shown the vehicle fleet including the two new street sweepers recently purchased for this contract. It was an informative afternoon, and I would like to thank Veolia for organising.

Corporate Health & Safety

Accidents and Incidents reported (Jan-Feb 2026)

There were no accidents reported in January and three reported in February. One accident occurred in the Lifeline office where a member of staff walked into a concrete post, no action was required. Two incidents involved tenants living in our independent living schemes: one was a same level fall and the other involved a burn to the shoulder.

Near Miss / Dangerous occurrence

A near miss occurred in February at the Oxenden Road depot, where a set of keys had been left inside a flammable storage container. The issue was identified and resolved on site during noise surveying carried out with Grounds Maintenance manager and the CHSO.

Verbal abuse / Physical attack

Eight verbal abuse incidents have been recorded since January 2026. One of these incidents resulted in the individual being added to the Customers of Concern Register

and prompted an urgent review of existing CCTV blind spots, which is now being addressed by the Property Team. The incidents are summarised below:

- Four incidents involving abuse over the phone
- One incident at a Council housing location involving two Grounds Maintenance staff removing a self-set tree
- Two incidents involving abusive emails
- One incident occurring in person at CAP

Noise & HAVs (Hand-Arm Vibration)

Noise surveying of Grounds Maintenance equipment has now been completed. This activity will continue to be undertaken annually to align with ongoing hearing health surveillance requirements.

The annual noise health surveillance was carried out in February, alongside the HAVs health surveillance. The results have indicated that some staff may be experiencing potential hearing difficulties. In addition, some staff members have been referred for a Tier 4 HAVs examination, which may result in a formal diagnosis of Hand–Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVs), a condition that is reportable under RIDDOR.

The CHSO will work closely with Grounds Maintenance Managers and the HR team to develop the required individual risk assessments and introduce further control measures where necessary.

Health and safety procedures and risk assessments

We are continuing to review and update our procedures and risk assessments, with our focus since the last update being on:

- Grounds Maintenance team Safe Systems of work and COSHH assessments, following successful completion of risk assessments.
- Health and Safety Audit and Inspections, ensuring we are adequately prepared for statutory and routine workplace inspections.
- Safety representatives and employee consultation, detailing how we will consult staff on health and safety matters.
- Updating the Council's Security threat procedure, which includes bomb and terrorist threats. (This work has identified a potential training gap which is being looked into.)

Hythe Pool

- Fire warden training has now been completed by the majority of pool staff. On 11 February 2026, the CHSO and the Pool Manager conducted a planned morning fire training exercise, which was successfully delivered and highlighted several areas within the pool's fire plan that require refinement. These updates will help ensure a smoother and more efficient evacuation process, particularly when members of the public are present.
- A further drill will be carried out within the next three months to include members of the public and to continue testing the effectiveness of the revised procedures.

Health & Safety activity continues to be monitored through the Staff Consultation forum and regular portfolio-holder updates.

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

Following the Social Housing Regulation Act, in January 2023 F&H agreed to take part in a voluntary pilot inspection exercise that the Regulator of Social Housing ran prior to full rollout in 2024. Along with revised consumer standards, the Regulator's new inspection regime - that included stock holding Local Councils for the first time - is designed to ensure that registered providers of social housing are meeting all the required standards. The Regulator uses a grading system of C1 (being the highest) to C4, which provides tenants with assurance of how well their landlord is delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards. With most of our Kent counterparts having had their formal inspections already, or currently being inspected, we have been advised that it is our turn now for an inspection, the site visit of which will take place in April, with indication of the outcome being given to us in the summer. This is a huge piece of work for the council's Housing Service and Officers will be heavily focused on achieving a good outcome.

The first new council homes at Risborough Barracks are now fully occupied with the next block of ten homes due to be taken on by the end of March. Further phases will come across during the spring/summer.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has remained around 125. Work on securing a number of properties for the HRA which will be used as temporary accommodation to alleviate the immediate pressures, is progressing well.

The private sector housing team has recently secured the enforced sale of a long-term empty private home in Coniston Road, Folkestone. The property had been vacant for at least 5 years and has been sold at auction, so that it can be renovated and become a home once again.

I attended STAP where tenants heard from the T Brown, who are about to start the new gas contract in April. Officers and tenants were part of the procurement team and early signs are that the new company will provide a good service for customers.

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has chosen to look at our approach to damp and mould and their input will be very helpful for the Damp and Mould policy currently being drafted. This is timely as Awaabs Law came into force in October 2025.

I attended the latest meeting of the Independent Living Forum and as ever it was very useful to hear about different issues and concerns direct from older residents living in council sheltered housing schemes. This was also another chance to see how the Mears Resident Liaison Officer, which is part of the new contract, is making a real positive difference in helping tenants who might need a bit more support with repairs and maintenance.

The long programme to get the new digital Lifeline system installed in all our Independent Living schemes has finally completed and they are all ready for the eventual digital switchover. There is now a programme underway to decommission redundant equipment in our Age Designated properties which are scattered across the district. These residents will be offered Lifeline Pendants should they wish to raise the alarm in an emergency.

Finally, the new Tenant Support Fund to help tenants who may need financial assistance with the introduction of the 'de-pooled' service charge, is open for applications ahead of the new charges which will apply from April, when the rent and service charge increases are levied to all tenants.

10. Report of Councillor McConville, Cabinet Member for Assets and Local Government Reorganisation

Assets

Work continues on the Leas to complete the cliff stabilisation works. I am grateful to everyone who regularly uses the Leas for their continued patience while this vital project gets completed. The work is due to complete by the end of the Easter school holiday. Once this project has completed then the even bigger project of creating the new play area on the Lower Leas Coastal Park can begin. Proludic, the chosen supplier are busy manufacturing all the new equipment which should all be installed ready for the summer holidays.

Work has begun on the Folca site to get it in the best possible shape for future occupants. My continued thanks to all officers working behind the scenes to bring about the council's vision for this important building in the heart of Folkestone.

Our grounds maintenance team works hard all year round, however with a few days of glorious sunshine already, we know that anything green will grow thicker and faster. As a district we have a huge area to cover and an endless amount of grass, hedges, trees, parks and playgrounds to maintain. A huge amount of thanks in advance to all the work in the pipeline over these spring and summer months.

As I mentioned, the sun is finally coming out, and I would like to remind you of the fantastic asset we have in the East Cliff facilities. These facilities are run and maintained for local people, and I would encourage all of you to make use of the tennis courts, bowls green, golf course and putting greens.

The Changing Tides Coastal Centre has been handed over from the developer to the council at Coast Drive in Greatstone. Officers are working hard to complete the final touches, an operator has been secured for the café and leases are being finalised for the beach huts. It will soon be open and provide a huge boost to the local area.

Design work continues on the Hythe Pool renovation project, with Officers expecting to be in a position to present the options to Cabinet in May.

Local Government Reorganisation

By the time we meet as a full council, the consultation period would have closed. It closes at 11:59pm on the 26/03/2026.

FHDC is in favour of model 3A, which would see us join a unitary authority with Dover, Canterbury, Ashford and Thanet. If you think this model is the best way forward for ensuring the delivery of local services, then please respond to the consultation.

As I have said before, this is the future of Kent, have your say on what you think Kent should look like in terms of political boundaries. Where do you want your council tax to go?

A huge amount of work is going on in the background both nationally, across Kent and within our own organisation. We are getting ready to for the decision, hopefully due by July, that will shape the political future of Kent. This means looking at everything we do, from council tax collection to waste, parking, housing and everything else. These will go under a microscope in what are known as Priority Activity Groups. Officers from all Kent councils, KCC and Medway will work in these groups to ensure that when vesting day occurs on 1st April 2028 that the new unitary councils are safe and legal and ready to seamlessly deliver services to resident. Thank you to all of our officers, including our Chief Executive, for the work they are doing on this, on top of all the regular day to day.