

**Council – 24 June 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**

I am delighted to report to the Council that much has been recently achieved at Otterpool Park and the hard work of our senior officers is paying off significantly.

We are convening several Otterpool Park meetings at the moment and more in the coming weeks and months, the Otterpool Park Owners meeting have been updated, the OSC Otterpool Park Task and Finish Group have been updated, the Joint Parishes meeting will be updated shortly and I am holding an update/briefing meeting for all members on the 17<sup>th</sup> June, in the Chamber, there is also a public engagement event scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> June in Sellenge. All of these meetings have all been diarised but to give you some headlines: the Waste Water Treatment Works has received Outline Planning permission and most importantly, our Partners Homes England have made a significant financial investment into the scheme by buying a parcel of land which we had under option.

I am continuing to meet regularly with MP's, KCC, neighbouring District Council Leaders, Homes England, Developers, Consultants and representatives of the 4 Local parishes that come together on Otterpool.

The Otterpool team continue to meet regularly with Homes England. Amongst many other things we are finalising is our Planning Collaboration Agreement and beginning to talk about our next collaboration agreement. We are in communication with the Government at a high level. We are making good progress with KCC in agreeing the Section 106 Agreement and we are anticipating that progress to continue.

**Planning Policy Portfolio Report**

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.

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 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**

As ever I've enjoyed the array of Council meetings through the last couple of months, including full Council meetings across County, District, Towns and Parish.

I have also had a number of Portfolio meetings with Alan Mitchell, Andrew Hatcher and Ewan Green. The meetings with Ewan are to discuss and bring forward a number of constitution changes that will come through A&G and then Full Council over coming months. I think all proposed changes can be written up as good governance / tidying up / alignment with elsewhere, and nothing radical, but I'll look forward to feedback as they go through A&G and at a future meeting of Council.

All Council previous accounts are audited up to date, including FPPG. A timetable has been agreed and work already in progress on the 2025-26 Capital and Revenue accounts ready for publishing and then to audit. The audit should commence in July with the ambitious target of getting to audited accounts before Christmas, which is ahead of the legal requirement for this year but an aspiration of our external auditor Grant Thornton that we are keen to support.

Although the figures for 2025-26 are not yet finalised, it is reasonable to say that there was a significant underspend last year, for a variety of reasons. As our MTFS had identified, although the budget for this year (as the previous 2) balanced and was OK, there were going to be big challenges for the next budgets (which we can see already due to multi-year settlements from Government). Prudently, the majority of that underspend will be put aside to ensure we can support the final years budgets, but there will be detailed reporting of the roll-forwards in due course.

The new Finance system scheduled to be delivered for the start of the new financial system was, on time and possibly a little under budget, although in use some small issues have been identified and sorted, and there may be more of those. However overall to deliver that project on a very tight timeline, and which will make significant savings in time over the coming years, was an impressive achievement for the whole team, and my thanks to them. Special thanks to Alan and Jonathan for leading through

this - many organisations, including Councils, have seen this go wrong, and it is entirely to their credit that ours have not!

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

This period culminated in our third Excellence in Volunteering Awards on 4 June. The event, at the Harbour Church in Folkestone, was a moving and inspiring celebration of nearly 100 nominees' contribution to their communities. The winners and runners up reflected the very wide range of volunteering in our district, from primary school children in Lyminge to a woman who has volunteered for Mencap in Folkestone for an amazing 50 years. I am delighted at how these awards have grown and established themselves over the last three years.

The awards are one way in which we support the voluntary and community sector. Another is through community grants, and I was pleased to attend the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) in April to help present our expanded schedule of allocations. This includes the replacement of £71,500 of government funding for community hubs and warm spaces, the district-wide mobile food service, food vouchers and Citizens Advice. There is also £25,000 for a project to support the resilience of the sector ahead of local government reorganisation. In addition, £50,000 has been allocated to sport and physical activity on the Marsh and £25,000 for the rest of the district, to support health and wellbeing, and members have an additional £2,000 each to allocate as they see fit through ward grants.

I was back at OSC in May for a presentation of exciting proposals for community sport provision at Martello Lakes and the refurbishment of Hythe Pool.

I visited Citizens Advice in Dover in April to hear how our grant is used to benefit people from this district, who can obtain vital help with debt and other issues face to face at the Rainbow Centre, over the phone or online.

Back in March, we welcomed youth forum members to the civic centre and discussed issues they had highlighted previously, including housing and recycling. The following week I visited the Marsh Academy to catch up on the brilliant work of the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, which we are again supporting to provide athlete mentoring to young people. While there, I enjoyed a tour of the leisure centre and then visited the nearby Lighthouse on the Marsh; a brilliant charity providing specialist education. April began with the Harvey school prizegiving, and I was pleased to see the community award, sponsored by the council, presented to a worthy recipient. More recently, I joined Cllrs Jones and Butcher to hear from Folkestone School for Girls students who visited the civic centre to present their excellent projects looking at the creation of the green space in the former bus station as part of Folkestone A Brighter Future (FABF).

As the conclusion of FABF works draw closer, I suggested we replace our April meeting of Folkestone Community Forum with a joint briefing for FCF members and town councillors on the town centre operating model which aims to ensure the physical improvements are only the start of the town centre's regeneration. We also discussed the Town of Culture Bid, the outcome of which we now do not expect to hear until July.

Along with the Leader, I attended two meetings with Kent County Council (KCC) at the Nepalese Community Centre in Cheriton. KCC had previously talked about the need to

secure a commercial rent for the building, and, along with Cllrs Meade and Prater, we were determined to support Folkestone Nepalese Community in demonstrating just how much it contributes, not just to the Nepalese who have made Folkestone their home but also the wider community. Happily, a new five-year lease at an affordable rent has now been agreed.

The District Food Network, which I chair, has now become the Kent Coast Food Partnership and the strategy group met in April as its development continues. The same month, I attended the North Downs Forum in Stelling Minnis with Coordinator Alise Kirtley, to explain what we are doing and encourage participation. In May, I enjoyed visiting the new community kitchen offering a coffee morning and lunch club at Hythe Youth Centre every other Wednesday.

Other meetings included Folkestone & Hythe Health Alliance at the civic centre in May and the Kent Police & Crime Panel at County Hall in April.

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

The revised Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) protocol was agreed by Cabinet in March, following which schemes were prioritised for 2026/27. A formal consultation has just completed for a proposed extension to Folkestone's Zone H which would incorporate new restrictions on the Leas in front of The Grand and The Metropole as well as along Metropole Road East and West, Dixwell Road (south) and Cliff Road. The officer's report has now been published. New permit holders only restrictions have come in on Radnor Cliff and Radnor Cliff Crescent (lower section) so that, in the summer months, parking is protected for residents. Additionally, to help with the cost of parking for our residents, we have rebranded and relaunched the Residents Discount Parking Permit which, for £20 per quarter, allows parking in council car parks.

I attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May where I was asked to consider a proposal for 20 minutes free parking in town centre car parks. Members of the committee supported officers' findings that the significant financial impact, and the enforcement difficulties, make such measures unworkable. However, I did undertake to look again at how we can best support businesses and residents for whom public transport is not an option. I am pleased that NSL (our parking enforcement partner) have shown their commitment to staff safety by issuing their teams with bodycams. Enforcement patrols have been stepped up for summer and this additional measure will ensure that they can carry out their roles both safely and effectively.

Since my last report, I have attended two meetings of the Shepway Bus Users group and chaired the District Focus Group. At the latter, KCC reported that following submission of their Delivery Plan to the Department for Transport in March, they are still waiting for final confirmation and receipt of funding. While services have been impacted by the Folkestone A Brighter Future works, new bus shelters have now been installed at the linear station in Middelburg Square. Once the works are complete, Stagecoach will allocate stops to services. Real time bus information will also be displayed at a central location and every bus stop will have a litter bin. I was disappointed to learn that Kent County Council (KCC) is not supporting the Crosskeys Reach the Beach service this year. Instead, KCC will enable Stagecoach to offer subsidised fares to/from the harbour on their 102 service. Finally on buses, the new

bus stops on West Road serving the Shorncliffe development, should shortly be adopted by Stagecoach.

I have been joining productive conversations on the interchange improvements initiative between FHDC, KCC and Southeastern Rail. Folkestone Central has been selected as one of five stations, from across the region, identified as a priority for integration between different modes of transport and active travel. Early quick-wins are likely to include improved signposting, with measures such as timetable co-ordination somewhat further down the line. Network Rail's Business Development Manager will in future be attending our District Focus Group to ensure effective communication between operators.

I have chaired the Licensing Forum, attended the White Cliffs Community Rail Partnership's stakeholder event and dropped in on Southern Water's Community Event where they announced their £42M investment plan for our area.

As summer kicks in, Environmental Enforcement have an increased presence in Folkestone's Coastal Park. Annual reports have been completed for Food Standards and Health & Safety. Meanwhile the Statement of Licensing Policy is being reviewed and was presented to the Licensing Act Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> June before going out to consultation.

I have now had confirmation from KCC of the status of our district's Highways Improvement Plans (HIPs). By March of this year 20 of our 30 towns and parishes had an active plan, with recent additions being Brenzett, Hawkinge, Postling, Stanford and Stowting. Folkestone Town Council's HIP identified Shorncliffe Road as a location where safety for pedestrians could be improved, so KCC are currently consulting on a scheme [here](#).

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

This month we continue to achieve our targets across information governance and complaints. 92% of FOI/EIR requests and 100% of SARs were closed within statutory timeframes. Also, all potential data breaches were assessed within 72 hours, with no breaches needing to be reported to the ICO. We are also on target for corporate and housing complaints, closing 97% and 100% on time, respectively.

We are seeing noticeable shifts in customer service, with CAP visits reducing. We are reviewing the CAP layout to improve it for staff and visitors. Call volumes have dropped and we've successfully reduced the average wait time, while ensuring complex calls are fully handled.

The IT team handled hundreds of service desk calls and, although we saw a spike in high-priority cyber security alarms, these were false positives caused by penetration testing. The team is progressing well on several projects, including Wi-Fi upgrades on various floors of the Civic Centre and the creation of an offline 'Battle box' of forms for business continuity, which we hope we won't ever need.

Everyone in the various teams continues to work exceptionally hard. As ever, we should all thank the excellent officers we have that continue to perform above and beyond despite so many major projects and changes to deal with

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

In May I attended the Tourism Board, which helps to shape the council's support for the sector. Tourism is a critical element of our local economy, supporting over 5,000 jobs, and bringing in 4.7m visitors, who spend an estimated £269m in the district. A new project for the Board, initiated by one of our local hotels, is to encourage more sustainable tourism, and to attract visitors with an interest in exploring the distinctive ecology and geology of our district. The Travel Foundation will be running a "Sustainability in Tourism" workshop to help develop a shared understanding of sustainability across the district, drawing on best practice from other coastal and rural destinations, and agreeing priorities and next steps. Along with Cllr Scoffham, I met with the co-ordinator of the South Kent Coast Food Partnership to see how sustainable food initiatives could form part of this project.

I also attended the Business Advisory Forum, which brings together businesses from around the district. We had a startling presentation from Sleeping Giant Media about the transformative power of AI, including a live reconfiguration of a participant's website from a single AI prompt. We also heard from the Department of Work and Pensions about the government's Youth Guarantee scheme, which offers subsidy and support to employers taking on a young person who has been on Universal Credit for six months or more.

I joined other councillors at the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway to celebrate the installation of their new array of solar panels – a project delivered in partnership with Kent Community Energy, and enabled by an F&HDC Green Grant. The project will reduce energy costs at a very challenging economic time for businesses in the district, as well as reducing carbon emissions, a forward-looking initiative as the railway approaches its 100th birthday next year.

The FABF works are almost three-quarters complete, with Bouverie Square now a particular focus of activity. Last week I joined a meeting with pupils from Folkestone School for Girls presenting the outcome of a project, supported by Jacksons Civil Engineering, to develop their own costed design ideas for Bouverie Square. We were all impressed by their ambition for the Square to be an inclusive and sustainable public space. Subsequently I met with "Let Grow" an organisation of local parents who are keen to see how the FABF project can contribute to Folkestone town centre becoming more child-friendly, and a place children can explore more independently.

I took part in a joint briefing for Folkestone Town Council and Folkestone Community Forum covering various town centre initiatives, including 19 Guildhall Street, the new base for Kent Food Hubs, which is being established with £45k from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and then the appointment of a Town Centre Manager, who will develop a year-round programme of markets and live events, and become a first point of contact for high street businesses and community groups. The TCM post will be funded for two years from Levelling Up funds and the UKSPF, and thereafter from commercial activities, like town centre markets.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee gave a positive response to the "Town Centre Operating Model", and called for a focus on running events in a sustainable way. There

was also support for the ambition to translate the model, if successful, to other town centres like New Romney and Hythe.

Over recent weeks I have taken part in panels considering applications for Rural England Prosperity Fund grants to support economic activity across our rural communities. Alongside this we have commissioned two skills programmes: “High Street Connect” and “Grow Rural”, supporting the growth and sustainability of town centre and rural businesses.

Back in April I joined a meeting of Shepway Heart, a community group focusing on heritage, arts, and tourism across the district. The focus was on September’s programme of heritage open days, which we were then able to promote to the District Tourism Board. More recently I met with Folkestone Fringe about their application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project that will celebrate Folkestone’s fishing and railway heritage. F&HDC’s new heritage strategy is at [www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/planning-policy/heritage-strategy-1](http://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/planning-policy/heritage-strategy-1) with links to “theme papers” which explore aspects of our local heritage in more depth.

We are fortunate to have such a vibrant ecosystem of community groups around our district - earlier this month I went along to the brilliant Big Green Fair in Sandgate which showcased the work of scores of environmental and sustainability groups. Elsewhere in the district I joined Elham’s monthly Friendship Lunch that provides a warm and welcoming space to older people who might otherwise become socially isolated. And finally I joined around 30 local councillors and community groups at the North Downs Forum, as we developed ideas for a range of projects from community energy (of particular interest to local businesses and community facilities) to projects that will fit well with the F&HDC sustainable tourism initiative – promoting and connecting the caminos and other walking routes that thread through the area, and a project to restore, protect, and promote the Nailbourne, a priceless element of our environmental heritage.

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

### **People’s Emergency Briefing**

The People’s Emergency Briefing is a film that features footage from a briefing for MPs in Westminster Hall last autumn which brought together leading UK experts in climate science, health, economics, national security and nature. The purpose of the briefing, which is explicitly non-partisan, is to support informed discussion about the scale and emergency of the current environment crisis and to consider what might be a proportionate response. Together with Councillor Abena Akuffo Kelly and Folkestone Town Councillors, I organised a public screening of the briefing at the Silver Screen in Folkestone on 13<sup>th</sup> May. This was attended by 150 people and led to a wide-ranging and encouraging discussion. The next screening, which Councillor Anita Jones and myself are helping to arrange will be on hosted by Hythe Cinema Club on 27<sup>th</sup> July at the Tin Tabernacle in Hythe.

### **Folkestone Forest**

The Folkestone Forest is an emerging campaign to plant trees across all parts of the Folkestone-Hythe District over the coming year. Environmental groups, council officers and interested parties attended an inaugural meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> June to consider setting up a Steering Committee to co-ordinate activities led by Geoge Kirby (Kent Men of the Trees). One of the main aims is to support local initiatives which have community support. This

will be crucial as maintaining trees once they have been planted is a key issue. As the relevant portfolio holder, this is a campaign which I am keen to promote as it has a direct bearing on climate change and biodiversity.

### **Green grants scheme**

A review of the green grants scheme was conducted at the end of May to monitor the success of the programme. Since the first round of applications were approved some eight months ago, eight projects have completed, fourteen are underway and two are nearing completion. To take a few examples, Lyminge Nursery and Postling and Dymchurch Parish Councils have all completed solar and battery installations, whilst ten infra-red heating units have been largely installed at Chichester Hall in Sandgate. Meanwhile, Go Folkestone has recycled or repurposed more than nine tonnes of electrical waste, three schools have moved forward with climate education projects, and work has started on heritage ponds at Acrise. A recent highlight was the opening of energy saving projects at the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch railway where Kent Community Energy has worked on energy saving projects with the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch railway. The ceremonial journey of the 'Solar Express' marked the occasion.

### **Big Green Fair**

The Big Green Fair, held in Enbrook Park on 7<sup>th</sup> June was designed to celebrate the great work that is going on in the district around sustainability, climate change and biodiversity. Organised by Sandgate Environment Group and tirelessly led by Gemma Adams, the fair attracted over 50 stall holders and around 1,000 people. It also marked the launch of a project to make Sandgate a community nature reserve by encouraging people to create mini habitats in their gardens, balconies and window sills. The fair was one of the initiatives supported by a 'Green Grant' scheme.

### **Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan**

The review of the Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan is now underway. The revised plan is clearer about the threats facing the landscape which it describes as 'beautiful but breaking', it emphasises the special qualities of the Kent Downs, and it highlights the importance of tranquillity and dark night skies. There is an increased emphasis on green finance, partnership and the aspiration for UNESCO Geo-park status is written into the plan along with references to the SDGs. The consultation period for the new plan lasts until 19 July and feedback will be most welcome.

## **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.
- Work continues on the two main waste and recycling project – Implementation of the 'Simpler Recycling' changes to collections and the next contact/service arrangement which need to be operational from early Jan 2029.
- The Implementation of Simpler Recycling proceeds well. We already have over 90% of the district receiving a recycling cycle. With strong support from housing colleagues, the team recently completed the rollout of communal food recycling bins to the remaining housing communal properties not currently receiving a service. This additional service appears to have been well received, and we hope will filter through to the food tonnages.
- The next contract project is still at an early stage, and the team are working on the procurement of a project consultant to support the options appraisal stage of the project.
- Summer has now started and I would remind members of the preparations the waste service has made in terms of street cleansing including, the extended operating hours, the 23 additional bulk bins, the use of e-bikes to clear hard to reach parts of the promenade, the five additional solar compactor bins installed since last year and the Love Your Beach campaign with its central message to dispose of your rubbish responsibly.

## **Corporate Health & Safety**

The annual health and safety report will be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee in July. The report captures activity over the past year (April 2025 – March 2026), which includes:

### Accidents and Incidents reported

14 recorded accidents, including two RIDDOR reports made to the HSE. The first was diagnosis of Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVs), which is a condition reportable under RIDDOR, this was picked up as part of our Annual Health Surveillance checks, all actions requested by the HSE have been completed. The second was an accident involving an employee being struck by a moving object which resulted in more than 7 days off work, which is reportable under RIDDOR due to the absence length.

### Near Miss / Dangerous occurrence

There were 5 near miss reports in the last financial year, which included reports of uneven walkways, trailing cables and open fire doors. The reporting of 'near-misses' demonstrates that staff are starting to report potential hazards that have the potential to cause harm.

### Verbal abuse / Physical attack

There were 29 reported verbal abuse incidents in the last financial year, the previous financial year, there were only 12 reported. Staff are now aware of how to report such incidents. Following the recent recorded spike in verbal abuse incidents, automated messages for telephones and email automatic replies, along with warning signage to be placed in the Customer Access Point and Independent Living Schemes are due to

be rolled out as soon as possible. This information sets out a zero – tolerance stance on verbal abuse.

### Lone Working

Following a review of our lone working arrangements, devices have now been selected for use, which are the current lifeline pendant and the mobile phone app (both monitored in-house by our lifeline team). The devices will be rolled out to all Councillor's and council staff who carry out medium to high-risk lone worker tasks.

### 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 (SSoW)
- Grounds maintenance risk assessments and COSHH assessments
- Site risk assessments for all grounds maintenance depots and sports facilities
- Health and Safety Audit and Inspections (to ensure 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)
- The Council's Security threat procedure, which includes bomb and terrorist threats

Health & Safety activity continues to be monitored through the Staff Consultation Forum (as the designated staff 'health & safety committee') and through regular Cabinet portfolio-holder update.

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

Since my last report, the inspectors from the Regulator of Social Housing have completed their onsite visit, conducting extensive interviews with officers, tenants, myself and the leader. In addition, hundreds of documents detailing our operational policies and procedures were provided to evidence how well our housing landlord service meets the Consumer Standards and Tenant Satisfaction measures. All in all, this was a very thorough and quite demanding process, and I'm grateful to all the officers and tenants who spoke to the inspectors and provided them with the information required to carry out their inspection. We are one of the last Local Authorities in East Kent to undergo a Regulatory Inspection and we expect the outcome to be published at the end of the July.

On 1st May several provisions of the Renters' Rights Acts came into force, including the end of section 21 'no fault' notices to end tenancies. Further provisions are still to come into force at later dates. Getting ready for the provisions of the new Act has been and continues to be a significant part of the workload for our Private Sector Housing team and the wider team. A new Enforcement Officer is now in post and an updated Civil Penalty Policy is due to be approved by Cabinet. A review of the Housing Enforcement Policy is being undertaken, and this will come to Cabinet later this year. The new requirements are being promoted to both tenants and landlords across the district.

Following council's agreement of an additional £5million to invest in securing more council-owned properties and thereby reduce reliance on private nightly lets and the costs this

entails, we have recently acquired our first new units for use as temporary accommodation - eight two-bedroomed flats in central Folkestone will be let by the end of this month. Nonetheless, as is the case across the country, the number of households in temporary accommodation remains relatively high at 126 (as of May 2026), although this has been levelling off for Folkestone and Hythe in recent months.

In the Housing Neighbourhoods service, Summer estate inspections have started, although with some distinctly un-summery weather. The neighbourhood inspections are a great opportunity for tenants and councillors to meet staff and contractors, and to raise any concerns about their neighbourhood or buildings. The full schedule, along with details of the actions that resulted from last year's inspections, can be found on the website at: <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholder-service/neighbourhood-inspections>

In line with the changes being made to recycling legislation, the housing and waste services teams have been working together to ensure we now have food waste recycling facilities available for our tenants who share a communal bin area. As part of a range of work to promote food waste recycling, and with support from Mears Corporate Social Responsibility funding, we are also able to offer free kitchen caddies to tenants who have recently had the new food bins installed.

Work on decarbonisation through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Wave 2 funding is now complete with a total of; 338 homes upgraded with energy efficiency improvements – added to the Wave 1 work, this makes a total of 448 homes that have been upgraded over the past 2 years. In May we started our own retrofit programme, with a capital improvement budget of £1m - which will look to install a further 100 homes with PV and Upgrade thermal insulation to help reduce fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency.

We also have several major improvement programmes in the pipeline to improve the energy efficiency of our Independent Living Schemes which include everything from; heating upgrades, CCTV, additional Door entry and LED Communal Lighting. We currently have over 80% of our stock at EPC C or above. This is in line with our programme to ensure we meet the Government requirement to achieve EPC rating of band C or above by 1st Oct 2030 - which is a fantastic achievement.

Compliance performance remains excellent in Housing Assets and our capital programme for this financial year is well underway, investing in our council owned and managed homes.

Repairs and Maintenance - The new gas contract with T Brown started on 1 April and has so far been progressing very well. Following the introduction of the first phase of Awaab's Law at the end of last year, the team are well prepared with the new damp and mould policy, and all staff have been trained on the new legislation.

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

I am very pleased to report that the stabilisation work to the cliff face on the leas has been completed and everything is on track to deliver our amazing new play areas in the Lower Leas Coastal Park. I am still very confident that this will be ready for the start of the summer school holidays.

The work to deliver the improvements within the Folca building are also on track and within budget.

Cabinet members are deep into discussions regarding a way forward for Hythe Pool, I would like to thank members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their thoughtful insights to help move the project along.

Again, a huge amount of thanks to our grounds maintenance team. With a sweltering week in May and recent rainfall, the team have been working extremely hard to ensure our residents have some fantastic public spaces to enjoy. Kingsnorth Gardens is looking exceptionally lovely at the moment.

I would also like to extend a thanks to the hardworking team who maintain our public toilets. The May bank holiday was especially frantic with lots of residents and visitors alike, out and about across the district. For a small team and a very large area to cover, you did very well indeed.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

We are still awaiting the decision on what Kent will look like from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028. However, plenty of work is going on behind the scenes as we wait to hear. Very pleased to have the appointment of an LGR director and my thanks in advance to Andrina, who will have a huge undertaking over the coming couple of years to ensure a smooth and safe transition both for all of our council staff and our residents.