

## Folkestone Town Meeting

**MINUTES of the Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting for the Parish and Town of Folkestone held at the Town Hall, Folkestone on Tuesday, 14th May 2024 at 7 p.m.**

**TOWN COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Jane Darling, Laura Davison, Peter Gane, Nicola Keen, Kieran Leigh, Adrian Lockwood (arrived 7:14pm), Liz McShane (arrived 7:14pm), Lucy McGirr, Jackie Meade, John Renshaw, Belinda Walker and Roger West.

**REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS:** Councillor Mike Blakemore (Folkestone & Hythe District Council – Cheriton Ward), Councillor Polly Blakemore (Folkestone & Hythe District Council–Cheriton Ward), Councillor Dylan Jeffrey (Kent County Council – Folkestone), Councillor Rory Love (Kent County Council – Cheriton Ward), Councillor Rebecca Shoob (Folkestone & Hythe District Council–Cheriton Ward), Ann Millington (Folkestone Fire & Rescue), Bill Flavell (Age UK – Marigold House), Georgina Cartledge (Shepway Spectrum Arts) and Mary Stredwick (Rainbow Centre).

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Toni Brenchley (Town Clerk), Georgina Wilson (Corporate Support Officer), Jennifer Griffin (Administration Officer) and Ian Bishop (Town Sergeant).

### **ABSENT**

Councillor Tim Prater

### **MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 9**

Prayers were led by Councillor Nicola Keen.

### **2071. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Charles Bain Smith, Bridget Chapman, Christine Dickinson, Peter Gane and Connor McConville

Councillor Meade explained that the reason for so many Councillors being absent was that there had been an emergency Audit & Governance Meeting at Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

Councillor Akuffo-Kelly informed all present that as this was the Meeting of Electors everyone was entitled to vote, not just Councillors. Therefore, the Minutes reflect a Majority vote.

**RESOLVED: To accept the apologies from Cllrs Charles Bain Smith, Bridget Chapman, Christine Dickinson, Peter Gane and Connor McConville.**

Proposed: Councillor Jackie Meade

Seconded: Councillor Nicola Keen  
Voting: F: Majority, Ag:0, Ab:0

## **2072. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations.

## **2073. MINUTES**

The Council was asked to receive and authorise the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 23rd May 2023 and to ask the Town Mayor to sign them as a correct record.

**RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 23rd May 2023 be received and signed as a correct record, subject to Councillor Dylan Jefferys amendment that the Minutes be altered to reflect that all those present were also able to cast a vote as Folkestone Electors, not just Councillors.**

Proposed: Councillor Belinda Walker  
Seconded: Councillor John Renshaw  
Voting: F: Majority, Ag: 0, Ab: 0

## **2074. OPENING OF PROCEEDINGS BY THE TOWN MAYOR**

The Town Mayor, Cllr Abena Akuffo-Kelly opened the proceedings of the meeting held in accordance with the requirements of Section 9(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **2075. QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS**

An update was provided by the Chair of the New Folkestone Society Matthew Jones and the Vice Chair Mark Hourahane. The New Folkestone Society discussed the redevelopment of Folkestone Harbour. They implored the Town Council to ask the developer to reconsider their project and encouraged them to meet with representatives from the project.

They have been strongly involved in the attempt to reopen Grace Hill Library. The library is now listed as “an asset of community value” and they asked Folkestone Town Council to stand strong behind the reopening and reimagining of Grace Hill Library.

The New Folkestone Society is working with The Bayle Residents Association and residents of Lucy Avenue on a 20 is Plenty scheme.

Mayor, Cllr Akuffo-Kelly thanked the New Folkestone Society for being an asset to Folkestone and the investment they make in the town as well as further afield.

Questions were asked by Mark Hourahane on behalf of John O’Conner from the Save Our Library Campaign.

1. Can Cllrs report on efforts to support the save our library campaign?  
Councillor Meade gave an update on the attempts to reopen the library and the water ingress damage to the building.  
Mrs Taylor spoke to ask why the library could not be relocated to the FOLCA building.  
Councillor Akuffo-Kelly commented that the current plan is to maintain the Grace Hill building rather than move the library.
  
2. How has Folkestone Town Council engaged with Kent County Council on the library?  
Councillor Meade gave an update on engagement with Kent Country Council.  
Mr Rylands spoke to ask if it would be possible for Folkestone Town Council to use CIL money to move building works forward and ask Councillor Mrs Clair Bell (Kent Country Council) to come to Folkestone for a public meeting regarding the library.  
Councillor Akuffo-Kelly asked Toni Brenchley, the Town Clerk, who responded that both the funding and possible meeting would be looked into, and a response would be given to Mr Rylands in writing.
  
3. Does Folkestone Town Council support the local solution brokered by Save Our Library (Creative Folkestone take over a lease of the building using one floor for their own use, subletting part of the building back to KCC for the library, with the third floor being used as a space for Community use.)?  
Councillor Laura Davison responded that a motion of support for maintaining and reopening the library had been passed by the Town Council (Full Council Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> March - agenda Number 2055).

Mrs Taylor enquired when the building of affordable housing on the Ship Street Gas Works site would begin.

Councillor Meade responded that this comes under the jurisdiction of the Folkestone & Hythe District Council and gave an update on the current position of the proposed building work on the site.

Mr Rylands asked Councillor Rebecca Shoob if Ship Street was to be disposed of. Councillor Shoob responded that this decision was still pending.

Ms Seymour asked for an update on the Cheriton Parking Permits plan since the April 2024 meeting.

Councillor Darling commented that Councillor Polly Blakemore was more qualified to answer the question as this fell to Folkestone & Hythe District Council for the next steps.

Councillor Blakemore explained that the response to the consultation had been so big it had taken longer than thought to get a report compiled, though Councillor Blakemore hoped to have it by the end of the week.

Ms Seymour asked what was happening with the Bus Station and enquired about the reduced bus timetable.

Councillor Keen stated that the Bus Station was a District Council issue, but that Councillor Walker had been working hard on the bus timetables although again this was not a Town Council issue.

Councillor Akuffo-Kelly stated that a meeting had taken place chaired by Councillor Walker, Councillor Davison and Stagecoach which resulted in good outcomes.

Councillor Mike Blakemore stated that the Bus Station location is being restored to a green space as part of the Folkestone a Brighter Future levelling up town centre development and the work will likely begin in the Autumn.

Councillor Walker stated that a Bus Users Group will be meeting sometime in June.

Ms Seymour felt that she hadn't seen the consultation and Councillor Mike Blakemore stated that it was widely circulated.

Mr Rylands enquired about when work would begin to restore Westbourne Gardens.

Councillor Akuffo-Kelly asked Councillor McShane to update Brian Rylands about this. Councillor McShane and Councillor Polly Blakemore stated that clearance work on the Gardens would be starting next week.

## **2076. REPORTS BY KENT POLICE**

There were no representatives from Kent Police present.

## **2077. REPORTS BY KENT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

A report was provided by Ann Millington, Chief Executive of Folkestone Fire & Rescue. The Chief Executive stated that there has been an increase in wildfires and flooding due to climate change.

The Chief Executive stated that heat was a major factor in death rates, particularly among the elderly. 260,000 people have died across Europe in the last 2/3 years due to heat. This should be taken into consideration when planning the building of new homes and streets.

As more homes are being “crammed together” it causes problems with access for Fire & Rescue and less water pressure across Kent. They are taking this to the Houses of Parliament as increasingly they cannot fight fires due to the water companies adding limiters to the pipe works.

The Council were informed they can assist in this issue by thinking about the design of new houses and adding water tanks underneath streets.

Kent has an extremely high level of drowning compared to the rest of the country, if the accident is inland then it is Fire & Rescue who respond to a water-based incident. Fire & Rescue are trying to raise awareness of this fact.

Fire & Rescue are involved in hundreds of missing person searches per year, particularly elderly people suffering from Dementia who are drawn to water and become a drowning concern. This is why Fire & Rescue often start their searches near bodies of water.

Fire & Rescue are keen to work with all levels of Government to work towards a more sustainable future and reducing harm.

There has been an increase in Safeguarding issues. Fire & Rescue hope the Council will be able to encourage more people, particularly those living with disabilities, to have Home Fire Safety Visits or a Safe and Well Visit, as well as promoting the correct method of dealing with scalding injuries.

The Chief Executive discussed the danger of lithium-ion batteries and that too few people are aware of these dangers.

The Council were informed of how bad access for fire engines is on The Leas and with the increase in converted flats it is becoming much more difficult to get fire checks carried out.

Fire & Rescue are keen to work with the Council to get messaging out on social media.

Councillor Akuffo-Kelly thanked the Chief Executive stating the Council would place information into the Community Magazine and on social media. Councillor Akuffo-Kelly suggested a workshop could potentially be held to increase public awareness of the safety issues raised in the report.

Councillor Keen stated Fire & Rescue should be involved in statutory planning for new builds. The Chief Executive agreed.

Councillor Leigh asked if Fire & Rescue were looking to do more integrated work with health services and to increase their response times. The Chief Executive gave an update on how they are working alongside health services and that we are the only county in the country who work alongside the health services to the extent we do in Kent.

Ms Cocks asked whether Fire & Rescue could include updates and advice in the My Community Voice emails. The Chief Executive said they would investigate doing this.

Mr Rylands asked for clarification on how the lack of water pressure across Kent was impacting the ability to extinguish fires. The Chief Executive informed Mr Rylands of the difficulties low water pressure causes in fighting fires and the increased risk to the lives of Firefighters due to these ongoing problems.

Councillor Meade, in her role as Chair of Planning at District Council, invited Fire & Rescue to a meeting to discuss how to pave the way to making Fire & Rescue consultees on some of the new housing developments.

#### **2078. CHEQUE PRESENTATION**

Former Town Mayor, Councillor Belinda Walker presented cheques to her nominated charities; The Rainbow Centre, Shepway Spectrum Arts, The Marigold Centre, Age UK, for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

#### **2079. REPORTS BY KENT COUNTY COUNCILLORS (FOLKESTONE AREA)**

Councillor Dylan Jeffrey (Folkestone) gave a report in which he stated that the Council had been faced with finding £89 million in savings and efficiencies. Councillor Jeffrey informed the assembly that the Council provide a range of essential Services to Kent residents, excluding schools this totals a cost of £2.2 billion per year. Kent County Council have reduced their overspend to £20 million and informed the assembled people that there would need to be further tight controls over the next three years. Kent County Council will however assist in sourcing funding through other means where cuts to services are necessary. He praised the staff at Kent County Council and described them as the Council's greatest asset.

Councillor Jeffrey gave an update on the closure of the Road of Remembrance and the maintenance of the local roads, including works carried out by utility companies.

Councillor Jeffrey gave an update on the Active Travel Scheme, Highways Improvement Plan and the Nature Recovery Strategy.

Councillor Jeffrey stated that Kent is now making savings thanks to a newly built solar farm. There was also an update on the installation of more electric car charging ports.

Councillor Jeffrey gave an update on the difficulties and lack of funding for adult and children's social care, as well as the difficulty in finding placements for children in care.

There was an update on the services that used to be provided at Grace Hill Library being made available in Folkestone town centre. There will be a consultation in the summer on the future of Grace Hill Library.

An update on the Entry and Exit system for the border was given.

Councillor Rory Love (Cheriton Ward) gave a report on schools in Kent outperforming schools across the country. 92% of Primary Schools and 88% of Secondary Schools are rated Good or Outstanding.

Wide ranging changes have been made to the Kent provision of Special Educational Needs. £2 million was invested in order to increase capacity in SEN Services. £500,000 was invested in flexible transport services.

An update was given on traffic control and pedestrian provision in the local area, as well as the proposed controlled parking zone in Cheriton.

Councillor Meade gave an update on her role at Kent County Council as well as a commitment to trying to stop the cuts in adult social care and helping to find accommodation for those in need.

Councillor Meade gave an update on local schools, including delivering provision of gardening and the Safer Travel to School programme.

Mr Rylands discussed the Health Impact Assessment not being completed on new builds and asked if Council could put pressure to receive one.

Councillor Jeffrey responded that the issue would be looked into.

Councillor Polly Blakemore raised that as the Road of Remembrance is now closed there should be signage put up to indicate this.

Councillor Jeffrey will take this suggestion back to East Kent Highways.

Councillor Darling asked Councillors Love and Jeffery about the cuts to Youth Services.

Councillor Jeffrey gave an update on all Kent County Council are doing to provide for Youth Services in Kent.

Councillor Davison asked about the library consultation and whether Kent County Council would share the questions ahead of time.

Councillor Jeffrey stated that he did not yet know the questions but would take all input from the community, as well as adding that KCC were looking to get something in place before the winter months.

Councillor Keen asked what would be put in place to replace the Youth Services lost through cuts.

Councillor Jeffery gave an update on Family Hubs and the Services supplied.

**2080. REPORTS BY FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS (FOLKESTONE AREA)**

Councillor Mike Blakemore (Cheriton Ward) gave a report on the deficit recovery, the Safer Streets initiative and an update on the work being done to combat the landslips.

Councillor Blakemore also gave an update on bus services, waste services, the proposed controlled parking zone in Cheriton, also building and maintenance work happening in Cheriton.

Councillor Keen asked what plans the District Council has for Folkestone.

Councillor Blakemore gave an update on the Ship Street development and the levelling up project in the town centre.

Councillor Davison gave an update on the collective work that the District Council have been doing and how people can contact their local Councillors.

Mr Rylands asked about the District Council's plans for preventing homelessness and supplying suitable housing.

Councillor Meade felt that an approach similar to Maidstone District Council could be appropriate for Folkestone.

**2081. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS OF FOLKESTONE TOWN COUNCIL**

13 June 2024 at 6.30 p.m. – Ordinary Full Council Meeting (Annual Governance and Accountability Return)



19 September 2024 at 7.00 p.m. – Ordinary Full Council Meeting  
13 May 2025 – (Provisional Town (Electors) Annual Assembly)

**The Meeting concluded at 9:22pm.**

.....Town Mayor

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