

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, 13 May 2025 at 7 p.m.

TOWN COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Bridget Chapman, Jane Darling, Laura Davison, Christine Dickinson, Peter Gane, Nicola Keen, Kieran Leigh, Adrian Lockwood, Connor McConville, Liz McShane, Lucy McGirr, Jackie Meade, Tim Prater, John Renshaw and Belinda Walker

REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS: Capt. (Retd) Ram Pun (Folkestone Nepalese Community), Mrs. Frankie Thompson (Folkestone Community Fridge), Sam O'Connor (Home-Start Shepway), Detective Inspector Carlo Capozzi and Inspector Johnny Allen (Kent Police), Guy Gardener and Andrea Allegra (Kent and Medway Community Resilience), Councillor Mary Lawes (Kent County Council – Folkestone East), Councillor John Baker (Kent County Council – Folkestone West), Council Leader Jim Martin (Folkestone & Hythe District Council)

IN ATTENDANCE: Toni Brenchley (Town Clerk), Georgina Wilson (Corporate Support Officer), Jennifer Griffin (Administration Officer), Ian Bishop (Town Sergeant) and Revd. Christopher Johnson (Mayor's Chaplain)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Roger West

ABSENT: Councillor Charles Bain Smith

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 4

Prayers were led by Revd. Christopher Johnson.

2179. APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Roger West.

Councillor Lucy McGirr informed all present that as this was the Meeting of Electors everyone was entitled to vote, not just Councillors. Therefore, the voting would reflect a Majority vote.

RESOLVED: To accept the Apologies from Councillor Roger West.

Proposed: Councillor Peter Gane

Seconded: Councillor Kieran Leigh

Voting: F: Majority, Ag: 0, Ab: 0

2180. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2181. MINUTES

The Council was asked to receive and authorise the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 14 May 2024 and to ask the Town Mayor to sign them as a correct record.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 14 May 2024 be received and signed as a correct record.

Proposed: Councillor Jackie Meade

Seconded: Councillor Christine Dickinson

Voting: F: Majority, Ag: 0, Ab: 0

2182. OPENING OF PROCEEDINGS BY THE TOWN MAYOR

The Town Mayor, Councillor Lucy McGirr opened the proceedings of the meeting held in accordance with the requirements of Section 9(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

2183. CHEQUE PRESENTATION

Former Town Mayor, Councillor Abena Akuffo-Kelly, presented cheques to her nominated charities; Folkestone Nepalese Community, Folkestone Community Fridge and Home-Start Shepway for the Mayoral fundraising events during the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

2184. QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS

Mark Hourahane and Matthew Jones from The New Folkestone Society gave an overview of the Society's activities over the past twelve months including their first Son et Lumière Remembrance Parade in Folkestone, and the Society's continued involvement in the 'Save Our Library' campaign.

In the coming twelve months The New Folkestone Society is hoping to "keep the conversations going" in particular around the re-opening of a Library and to support the wider community through initiatives such as children's literacy and the continuation of their monthly coffee mornings.

The New Folkestone Society asked two questions of Councillors. The first regarded the Town Sprucer. Sunflower House is no longer able to support the initiative, would it therefore be possible for Folkestone Town Council to discuss with Folkestone & Hythe District Council to find a way to keep the Town Sprucer.

Councillor Jackie Meade acknowledged the role the Town Sprucer plays in the maintenance of the town and responded that the Town Sprucer need to contact the Council themselves with regard to potential funding or support.

The second question asked was where Folkestone Town Council sees itself sitting in the Local Government Re-organisation.

Councillor Meade responded that according to the White Paper it is inferred that the Town Council will receive more responsibility. The Town Council is already in discussion with Folkestone & Hythe District Council as to which assets the Town Council would be taking over, although no agreement has yet been made.

2185. REPORTS BY KENT POLICE

Detective Inspector Carlo Capozzi and Inspector Johnny Allen gave a report on behalf of the Kent Police.

DI Capozzi informed the meeting that with additional Government funding for town centre policing, it has been possible to add three new Officers to the towns Community Safety Unit. This means that the Unit now consists of one Sergeant, seven Police Officers and four PCSO's.

There has been a 1.5% decrease in crime in the area, although there has been an increase in shoplifting which is also being seen nationwide.

Anti-Social Behaviour has lowered throughout the town.

The Hotspot Grip Zone around Harbour Ward is being reduced, however there is still funding for the Grip Zone and Operations being carried out in the area to combat crime and anti-social behaviour will continue.

Operation Pilot has seen intelligence led visits to premises that are not complying with their premises licences.

Operation Sentry, focusing on road safety operations, has been successful.

The Child Centred Policing Team has been well received in Schools and will continue over the coming twelve months with two new PC's.

Knife crime in the area is low, however Operation Sceptre, which tackles these forms of offences, is ongoing.

The Police's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) events will continue throughout the coming year.

My Community Voice and Ward Surgeries with Beat Officers will continue.

Inspector Allen detailed the 'Right Care, Right Person' initiative which has seen the Police respond to less medical calls, placing less pressure on Officers and allowing them more time to respond to other calls. Although this does not extend to people suffering a mental health episode where they may be a danger to themselves or the attending Ambulance crew.

Inspector Allen invited those present to speak to him after the meeting had ended as the Inspector is new to the area and keen to hear the views and concerns of those who live in Folkestone.

Councillor Nicola Keen asked about the lack of Police presence at meetings of the Youth Justice Teams in Kent. DI Capozzi made a note to look into this.

Councillor Liz McShane asked the reason for the lowering of Anti-Social Behaviour in the town. DI Capozzi stated this may well be due to the night time economy of the town beginning to pick up, as well as providing details of initiatives Kent Police are using to target the areas where Anti-Social Behaviour occurs in the town.

Councillor Laura Davison requested the name of the dedicated Broadmead Ward Police Officer. DI Capozzi made a note to inform Councillor Davison of this as he did not have that information to hand.

Councillor Davison also spoke of concerns around community division and how the Police may be intending to work towards more community cohesion. Particularly in regards to Police Ward Surgeries as Councillor Davison is unable to remember the last time there was such a surgery in Broadmead Ward.

DI Capozzi informed Councillors that a lack of Ward Surgeries may be due to scheduling issues, but he would look into this as he understands the importance of regular local engagement meetings. DI Capozzi is open to working with Councillors to creating more engagement between the community and the Police.

Councillor Bridget Chapman thanked Kent Police for all that they do. Councillor Chapman and Councillor Peter Gane raised concerns regarding the dangerous driving of bikes around the town, potentially causing risk to both the riders and others.

DI Capozzi informed the Meeting that there will be a week of action in June to tackle this exact issue. This will fall under Operation Sentry and the Police Officers both requested Councillors and the public to feed back to them where the areas in which issues arise, as they will then be able to focus their efforts on those areas.

Councillor Jackie Meade raised the concerns of young people in the area regarding knife crime and drug use. Councillor Meade asked what Kent Police were putting in place to tackle these concerns. Councillor Meade also highlighted increased drug use in Tontine Street.

DI Capozzi reiterated that although knife crime is low in Folkestone, Operation Sceptre is in place. Kent Police have engaged with schools in the area and will look to continue that engagement, in order to speak to young people and alleviate fears. DI Capozzi requested that any behaviour such as drug abuse is reported to the Police who will then be able to plan for Officer presence in that particular area.

2186. REPORTS BY KENT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

There was no representative available from Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

2187. REPORTS BY KENT AND MEDWAY RESILIENCE FORUM

Guy Gardner and Andrea Allegra gave reports.

Andrea Allegra gave an overview of who Kent and Medway Resilience Forum are and the role the Forum and their partners play within the community to build resilience and planning for emergency situations.

Flooding is the most severe emergency facing Folkestone. However, the Forum also helps to deliver emergency plans for events such as wildfire, severe weather or loss of electricity.

The Forum and their partners are in place to support and advise local communities in co-ordinating multi agency responses to emergency situations. This is achieved through training, resources that are available on their website and table talk discussions.

Guy Gardner spoke about the severe risk of flooding in Folkestone from the Pent Valley Stream, referencing the 1996 flooding. There is no specific emergency plan for the Pent Valley Stream which floods rapidly and without warning.

In the event of the Pent Valley Stream flooding there would not be time for a co-ordinated response such as evacuations, instead people would self-evacuate into the streets. There are more houses of multiple occupancy and significantly more basement flats in the area than there were in 1996 which create significant risk in the event of flooding.

In view of this the Forum wish to create 'The Street Team', made up of volunteers familiar with the area that will be able to assist people efficiently and safely in what to do and where to go. 'The Street Team' would also be able to go around the local area advising residents and encouraging them to sign up to the Environmental Agency's Flood Line.

With that in mind Guy Gardner requested Councillors to investigate further how to play a role in creating 'The Street Team'.

Councillor McGirr informed the Forum members that Folkestone Town

Council had put out a call for Flood Wardens to the local community, also that several Councillors and Council Officers had offered to undertake Flood Warden training.

Councillor Gane discussed the 1996 flooding. The Environmental Agency have stated that a reoccurrence of the flooding is less likely and would be less severe as the area around the Pent Valley Stream has been cleared.

Guy Gardener stated that the flooding would arrive quickly and leave quickly and so local Flood Wardens were vitally important during the period of flooding.

Councillor Bridget Chapman enquired about the new European Exit and Entrance System. Guy Gardner informed Councillors that the new system will be phased in over time.

Councillor Laura Davison enquired about the possibility of training for Councillors in how to deal with possible gridlock from the new system coming into force. The Resilience Forum will send information regarding this to the Town Clerk.

Councillor Adrian Lockwood discussed the Environmental Agency's monetary investment in the Pent Valley Stream and the most up to date Flood Maps. Guy Gardner advised he would send a link over to the most recent Flood Map.

The possibility of adding a 'Community Resilience' section to future Council Agendas was discussed.

2188. REPORTS BY KENT COUNTY COUNCILLORS (FOLKESTONE AREA)

Councillor Mary Lawes (Folkestone East) introduced herself and stated that there could not be a report from the past twelve months as the Kent County Council elections had only happened eleven days ago.

All County Councillors are newly elected and currently undergoing training.

Councillor Lawes stated that at the forefront of the next twelve months in Folkestone East were bus services and road resurfacing.

Councillor John Baker (Folkestone West) introduced himself and expressed his commitment to the people of Folkestone, with the re-opening of the town Library being of utmost importance.

Councillor Tim Prater (Cheriton, Sandgate and Hythe East) introduced himself as a County Councillor and thanked all who voted no matter the party they voted for.

Councillor Kieran Leigh asked whether the Cabinet had been selected and Councillor Prater stated the Leader would be elected 22 May 2025 and a Cabinet formed after this.

2189. REPORTS BY FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS (FOLKESTONE AREA)

Council Leader Jim Martin gave an overview of the District Council's activities over the past year and plans for the next twelve months.

Discussing the new European Entrance and Exit System, Councillor Martin confirmed that it would be phased in from November. First with the Channel Tunnel and then with Dover.

The reorganisation of Local Government was discussed and the ways it may work in Kent with either three or four Unitaries.

Councillor Martin discussed Folkestone & Hythe District Council's Corporate Plan 'Our District, Our World'.

Councillor Martin gave an update on the progression of Otterpool Garden Town which currently has plans for 8,500 homes looking to rise to 10,000 homes upon completion. The District Council is currently working with Kent County Council on the development of KCC's waste and recycling plant in Otterpool.

Kent County Council has validated planning for a waste water treatment plant to clean the Stour in order to tackle the phosphate and nitrate levels.

In the coming months Folkestone & Hythe District Council are hoping to engage more with young people living in the area.

Folca and associated buildings in the area have plans for refurbishment that are steadily progressing.

The new Green Grants and Sustainable Futures Forum are going from strength to strength.

The District Council's recycling rate is now up to 50%.

Councillor Martin gave an update on the District Council's 'Council House Programme.' The District Council has exceeded the 20 houses per year quota and is on track to build 99 affordable houses during its four year period, with a further 77 houses built on Council owned land at Biggins Wood.

Councillor Adrian Lockwood enquired about the plan for reorganisation and if it were possible that multiple bids could be put in regarding how the county would be separated into unitaries. Councillor Martin explained that there would be substantial discussion beforehand to prevent this from happening.

Councillor Nicola Keen and Councillor Peter Gane raised that affordable rent is not at a rate that can be afforded by Council house tenants. Councillor Martin explained that affordable rent is a complex issue, the need for houses to be built is significant and the decision on rent can be covered at a later date.

Councillor Jackie Meade and Mark Hourahane of the New Folkestone Society made suggestions for affordable housing being built on the Gasworks site at Ship Street and Monk Farm Road. Councillor Martin explained that there is difficulty in finding interest for those sites from developers but that the need for more housing is at the forefront of the District Council's mind.

2190. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS OF FOLKESTONE TOWN COUNCIL

- 12 June 2025 at 6.00 pm – AGAR (Full Council) Meeting
- 18 September 2025 at 7.00 pm – Ordinary Full Council Meeting
- 12 May 2026 – (Provisional) Town Electors Annual Assembly

The Meeting concluded at 9:19 pm.

.....Town Mayor