

District Councillors report for 2022/23

This past year has seen some extraordinary challenges for us all with a Cost of Living Crisis triggered by the invasion of Ukraine last February and the subsequent rise in energy costs. Your District Council has been active co-ordinating support from local organisations and Jenny convened a Cost Of Living summit on 20 September. The District Council has also distributed energy grants and other support from central government. It continues to run a hardship scheme for those facing financial difficulty in paying council tax and the Community Hubs set up by Jenny during lockdown in Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh have been key in reaching those in need across the district. Warm spaces were also set up across the district to enable people to have somewhere to go to be warm and have company.

Many people in our district took part in the Homes for Ukraine scheme and your District Council has co-ordinated support for these refugees as well as those arriving under the Afghanistan scheme.

On the Environment front we've seen carbon emissions and cost savings of around 5% from Veolia the company that collects kerbside waste. New initiatives to collect textiles and coffee pods are planned for the year ahead. We have also worked with KCC and Connected Kerb to install 103 Electric Vehicle Charging points in council car parks so that people can top up whilst shopping locally. We've also taken part in KCC's SolarTogether scheme which uses collective buying to get a good price for individual householders on solar panels and batteries. Our parks have retained their Green Flag status and we are seeking to manage our green spaces to help pollinators with some areas being allowed to go wild and use of weedkiller minimised.

We were successful in our £19.8m Levelling Up bid to the Government for a project to transform the bus station in Folkestone to a green park and the buses to use the neighbouring streets. The aim is to improve both bus and pedestrian access to the town and links with the District Council's plans to turn Folca (the former Debenhams) into a medical centre, council services and more. The scheme should be delivered by 2025.

35,000 residents have now signed up for My Account that enables them to access information about services such as waste collection and planning. Your District Council continues to move access to services online which is available 24/7 and reduces costs.

The District Council funded the participation of the Red Arrows in the Folkestone Air Show in August and made a commitment to do the same in 2023.

As part of her role as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Services Jenny has been the District Council's Armed Forces Champion. The District Council has retained its Gold status for Armed Forces an assessment that covers how the council deals with serving and retired military personnel and their families.

Among the housing projects the District Council has been advancing are new homes and employment land at Biggins Wood and the former gas works site at Ship Street, both in Folkestone. A programme of retrofitting council houses to improve their energy efficiency has started with grant funding of £2.6m won from the Government. New council homes have also been built with plans for more – there are currently over 1,500 eligible households on the housing waiting list. New developments are required to provide a proportion of their homes for affordable housing and this continues to be the largest provision of new social housing. Higher interest rates and energy costs have led to the planned Leisure Centre at Princes Parade being paused. Plans for Otterpool Park Garden Town progressed with outline planning permission granted for the first 1,000 homes.

Your District Council has also been working with Damian Collins MP and KCC to secure new nuclear at Dungeness. The site is suitable for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) which would provide both energy security and jobs for our district. We hope the new council will recommit to this aim.

Jenny and Susan have continued to offer advice and help to residents across a range of issues and we have been in regular attendance at parish council meetings to listen to local views and answer questions. They have provided reports to the parish councils and local newsletters and supported local events. They have allocated their ward grants to:

£300 Lyminge Scouts for a new website

£240 Stanford Parish Council for First Aid training

£550 Stelling Minnis Village Hall for equipment for the new Film Club

£1,000 Sellindge District Playing Field for new flooring

£500 St Marys church Sellindge for floor renovation

£410 Academy FM Folkestone for a project with Stowting School

At the May elections Susan stood down from District Council after 24 years of service but continues as your County Councillor. Jenny has been re-elected to the District Council and has been elected Leader of the Conservative Group.

Looking back over the last four years of the council there have been many challenges including lockdown, the billeting of asylum seekers at Napier Barracks and local hotels, the continuing war in Ukraine and its effect on inflation. Your District Council has been at the forefront of efforts to help residents, businesses and the charities. Now a new council will take forward this legacy and takes over with our finances in good order and the opportunity to create a new community at Otterpool Park which will provide the homes and jobs we need for the future. Let's all wish it the best in delivering its responsibilities.