

# Public Document Pack

## COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2020 at 5.00 pm in Online Only.

**Present:** Councillor Jason Savage (Chairman); Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Crittenden, Currie, Day, Dennis, Dexter, Duckworth, Cllr Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Kup, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, Ovenden, Parsons, L Piper, Cllr Rev. S Piper, Potts, Pugh, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Scobie, Scott, Shrubbs, Taylor, Tomlinson, Towning, Whitehead, Wing, Wright and Yates

#### 1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Braidwood, Game and Hart.

#### 2. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Vice Chairman and agreed that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 27 February 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

#### 3. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Congratulations were offered to all Councillors and Council staff regarding their efforts in supporting the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Condolences were given to the families of those who have lost their loved ones during this time.

Members also noted the passing of former Councillor Victor Harris who represented Birchington for four years and former Chairman's attendant Keith Hauxwell. Tributes were paid and Councillors paused for a minute's silence.

Councillor Reverend. S Piper and Councillor Tomlinson paid tribute to Keith Hauxwell, noting his exceptional knowledge of those he worked with and his good nature.

#### 4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 5. **PETITIONS**

##### (a) **Adequate Toilet Facilities at Thanet Beaches Petition**

Mr Adrian Smith presented an e-petition regarding adequate toilet facilities on Thanet Beaches. Members noted that the following e-petition contained 147 signatures:

"We the undersigned petition the council to hold a thorough review of the facilities available around the Thanet beaches to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both visitors and residents and to invest in adequate infrastructure to meet the outcomes."

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the petition was referred to Cabinet without debate for report back to the Council within three ordinary meetings.

(b) **Postpone Dog Restrictions on Thanet Beaches Petition**

Members noted that the e-petition regarding dog restrictions on beaches contained 27 signatures:

“We the undersigned petition the council to Postpone the regular dog walking restrictions on Thanet beaches for a month. With social distancing still in place, we are extremely lucky to have the beaches as an extra space to walk our dogs whilst keeping our distance. It seems extremely short sighted that, when other councils have lifted restrictions TDC have decided not to. Walking on the beach is an ideal way to keep the space between yourself and others. We will not have day trippers, visitors or holiday makers. The beaches will not be any busier than they are at the moment. We urge TDC to reconsider their decision.”

In accordance with the Council’s Petition Scheme, the petition was referred to Cabinet without debate for report back to the Council within three ordinary meetings.

**6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

(a) **Question no1 - Emergency Powers**

Ms Austin asked Councillor Whitehead the following question:

“In my years of working in and with Local Authorities, I’ve only seen Emergency Powers used in very exceptional circumstances, but in Thanet they seem to be used frequently.

Could you please advise how many times such powers have been used over the past year and why this was necessary?”

Councillor Whitehead responded with the following points:

- Emergency powers refers to the Council’s ability to make urgent decisions. These are made across all Councils for a variety of purposes, in four circumstances:
  - General exception - decisions that have not been included in the Forward Plan, but where there are still at least five days between the date of decision and the date of publication.
  - Special urgency - decisions which have not been included in the Forward Plan, and where there are not five clear days between the date of decision and the date of publication
  - Urgent implementation - decisions that are taken that require the need to waive the conventional call in period
  - Urgent items - items that are to be considered by a committee which have not been placed on to an agenda at least five clear days prior to publication
- The Council had used these powers three times in the last 12 months, relating to the sale of Dreamland in July 2019, updating the IT housing system in preparation for moving the service ‘in-house’ on 1st June 2020 and lastly relating to the replacement of 11 refuse freighters on 8th June 2020.
- This last decision relates to section 13.03b of the Constitution, which required the approval of a key decision to commit the £2.2m funding for the delivery of an already approved project. This was a procedural omission due to the pressures on the Operational Services team, the project already having been approved, and a General Exception Notice route was then followed rather than delaying the purchase of the vehicles which could ultimately have impacted on the future delivery of the waste service.
- In comparison to other local authorities, in the last year, Dover District Council took 11 urgent decisions and Folkestone and Hythe took five urgent decisions, in comparison to Thanet’s three.
- It is entirely right to ask questions surrounding our usage of these powers, and it is also right to note and expect that these powers will only be used in exceptional

circumstances. Time pressures are a constant consideration, but justification and reason must always be sound and backed up by public accountability, both in terms of forum questioning, and in publication of all Urgent Decisions, as already practiced.

- The details of all our “Urgent” decisions can be found in the Delegated Decisions section of the TDC website.

## 7. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

### (a) **Question no1 - Anti-Social Behaviour**

Councillor Taylor asked Councillor Whitehead the following question:

“With increasing criminal activity and Anti Social Behaviour notably in Dane Park and parts of Dane Valley can we be assured that when the Thanet Community Safety Partnership next meets with the police this issue and safety of the residents will be on the agenda for discussion and action.?”

Councillor Whitehead responded that:

- The Council is aware of the spike in behaviour and would like to express sympathy to those affected. The Community Safety Team are aware of incidents and are liaising with Kent Police to make sure public spaces are safe.
- The Council are aware of the on-going issues relating to an unauthorised encampment in Dane Park and long term plans are being developed to help resolve this (with operational detail remaining confidential), to ensure that all communities are safe and provided for.
- If residents are experiencing issues related to Anti-Social Behaviour, in any area, the Council would urge them to report them either via 101 to Kent Police or [community.safety@thanet.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety@thanet.gov.uk).
- The partnership is committed to tackling Anti-Social Behaviour in all forms so please do not hesitate to raise your specific concerns either directly with myself or with relevant officers.

Councillor Taylor followed up his question by asking that since the question had been submitted, there had been two assaults in Dane Park, and whether it was possible to have CCTV in the park.

Councillor Whitehead responded that any interventions will be done alongside Kent Police and the Community Safety team who are working out the best way to deal with these issues, but this is an on-going process at the moment. The measures are under constant discussion.

### (b) **Question no2 - Ramsgate Pontoons**

Councillor Towing asked Councillor Everitt the following question:

“Have the fees been paid to TDC for the mooring of the two pontoons at Ramsgate harbour since September 2019 , how much was paid, over what period, who are the owners and any agreement for how long they will be moored?”

Councillor Everitt responded that:

- Fees have been paid by the customer Bam Nuttall for the mooring of the two pontoons.
- The customer is being charged a published tariff rate however, it should be noted that the schedule of fees and charges does not include a specific tariff for a pontoon as this is not classed as a vessel.
- Ramsgate Harbour is run on a commercial basis and the nature of individual transactions between the Harbour and any of its customers must remain

confidential. This is not only to protect the confidentiality that must exist between the harbour and its customer but is also to protect the Council's position in terms of competition that exists in the wider maritime market.

- It is for the customer to decide how long they wish for the pontoons to remain at Ramsgate, there is no agreement in place for this.

Councillor Towing followed up his question by asking if it would be possible if he could find out what period the money has been paid over and how much.

Councillor Everitt responded that the Monitoring Officer can explain the Council's legal position, but the amount paid is substantial and appropriate.

(c) **Question no3 - Waste Vehicles**

Councillor Wing asked Councillor Albon the following question:

"Why was it necessary to use 'emergency powers' to spend £2.2 million on replacement waste and recycling vehicles?"

Councillor Albon responded that

- The 2020/21 capital programme includes an approved budget for the replacement of a substantial proportion of the council's refuse vehicle fleet. The expected economic life span of a refuse collection vehicle is 7 years; this is because of the heavy nature of the work and type of load the vehicles carry.
- The vehicles to be replaced were purchased in 2013. These vehicles can no longer be economically maintained and it will quite simply leave the council unable to deliver a full household waste service if they are not replaced. The project delivery has therefore been programmed to coincide with the end of the existing vehicle's economic life.
- Section 13.03b of The Constitution requires the approval of a key decision to commit the £2.2m funding for the delivery of this approved project.
- Unfortunately due to considerable pressures on the Operational Services team as a result of maintaining a full household waste service during the COVID-19 pandemic, the proposed spend was not included on the Forward Plan in accordance with standard timescales.
- This was a procedural omission and a General Exception Notice route was then followed rather than delaying the purchase of the vehicles which could ultimately have impacted on the future delivery of the waste service.

Councillor Wing followed up her question by asking: since the current lifespan of a refuse vehicle is seven years, their replacement should have been predicted. This should not have been an emergency situation. While there is no disagreement about the purchase of the vehicles, given the Council did not go through a formal tendering process, how would TDC guarantee the best value for public money.

Councillor Albon asked the Director of Operations, Gavin Waite, to respond. TDC used a framework, that was similar to the one used by Councils across the country, designed to undertake the procurement and make sure all due diligence is done. They host the competition process to deliver best practice and therefore best value to the Council. This process is quicker and easier as it solves any issues regarding procurement rules, and was able to be completed quickly at the time. Further, this was a procedural error which should have been on the Forward Plan, as it has been on the Project Plan for the last two years.

(d) **Question no4 - Jetskis**

Councillor Farrance asked Councillor Albon the following question:

"TDC works very hard to ensure the safety of residents and visitors. In this regard, what steps are being taken to ensure that jetskiers only launch from the designated four slipways, and those who come into the swimming areas and 'buzz' kayakers and paddle boarders will be dealt with appropriately?"

Councillor Albon responded that:

- A communication has been sent out to all members of the water user group reminding them of the rules and what is expected of them.
- Any individuals identified as breaching the rules continuously will be contacted and their permits revoked.
- The RNLI will tackle those breaking the rules on beaches they patrol.
- The Council are designating a summer beach & coastal supervisor who can support us by being the eyes and ears on the ground, closing barriers, engaging with water users and reminding them of the rules.
- This ideally would be a longer term position, as it is very much needed with our increasingly busy beaches and coastline, particularly in providing weekend support for our staff and partner agencies as well as gathering intelligence on the problems.
- From this monitoring and reporting, the Council wants to review the effectiveness of the signage, barriers and bollards at some of the problem hotspots this summer. This would also look at some effective ways of communicating with the public on the rules and regulations moving forwards.
- Furthermore, the Council intend to meet with the local jet ski clubs to find some better ways of holistically managing the issues faced, finding solutions by working in partnership.
- Longer term, the Council aim to strengthen our powers over the coastal by-laws to make them more easily enforceable with more serious penalties, and are exploring doing this through a Public Spaces Protection Order encompassing all old by-laws and new requirements.

Councillor Farrance followed up her question by noting that this was a reassuring report and of course it was an excellent idea to work with the clubs, but the issue is with the people launching jet skis illegally who don't want to join local clubs. When Councillors or members of the public see individuals misbehaving what should be done to tackle this and who should the issues be reported to.

Councillor Albon responded that he is always available, and that there is an out-of-hours Council phone number to call and the message will be passed on to the relevant officer. Once a coastal supervisor has been recruited, they would be able to deal with these matters too.

## **8. NOTICES OF MOTION**

### **(a) Notice of Motion - Fireworks**

It was proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Rawf that:

The Council recommends to Cabinet that Cabinet reviews the Council's legal powers in relation to public firework displays and the use of fireworks generally in the District, and in particular:

- a requirement that all public firework displays within the local authority boundaries to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people;
- the promotion of a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people – including the precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks;
- lobbying the Government urging them to 'utilise any levers at their disposal to mitigate any negative impacts on animals and vulnerable people of the hosting of firework displays;
- lobbying the Government to impose tighter controls on the use of fireworks;

- encouraging local suppliers of fireworks to stock 'quieter' fireworks for public display.

In accordance with council procedure rule 3.7, Councillor Whitehead provided a response to the motion.

Members chose to debate the motion.

A recorded vote took place on this item due to the nature of the meeting being completely virtual.

The Monitoring Officer conducted a recorded vote on the motion as follows:

49 Members voted in favour of the motion: Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Currie, Day, Dexter, Duckworth, Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Kup, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, Ovenden, Parsons, L Piper, Potts, Pugh, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Savage, Scobie, Scott, Shrubbs, Taylor, Towning, Tomlinson, Whitehead, Wing, Wright and Yates.

No Members voted against the motion.

1 Member abstained from voting on the motion: Councillors Rev. S Piper.

2 Members were unable to vote due to technical difficulties: Councillors Crittenden and Dennis.

The motion was carried.

## 9. **LEADERS REPORT**

In summary, the Leader's report commended the efforts of the Council staff, Members, and the workers on the frontline who have helped to fight COVID-19, through continued service delivery, handling beach management challenges and supporting businesses and will now begin to move on and recover from this. Additional detail to the report is attached as Annex 1 to this minute item.

Councillor Ashbee as Deputy-Leader of the Conservative Party responded on behalf of Councillor Game with the following points:

- There was agreement with the comments sending sentiments to families who have lost loved ones and thanking the staff members who stepped up to help at this difficult time to keep services going and providing an outstanding response to the needs of our community.
- The behaviour of those visiting our beaches cannot be condoned. But it is good to see our residents enjoying the opening of pubs and bars once again.
- The assistance central government will give local authorities for recovery is uncertain
- A cross-party finance working group should be set up to assist in reviewing a future emergency budget, with the input of all elected Members.
- On the subject of Uncle Mack's plaque, its future should be decided through consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny panel and the town council, rather than one person. The Pleasurama development will be an undoubted improvement to Ramsgate and a site that has sat derelict for many years.
- In regards to the earlier news surrounding the granting of the Development Consent Order (DCO) to the Manston site, the Conservative group welcomed the decision and is pleased to move on in a time of uncertainty. Districts across the country will now struggle to attract inward investment and create jobs at a time

when many businesses will be struggling as a result of the pandemic. Thanet is fortunate to have private investors willing to put £300m towards a project that will create good long term work and lay the foundations for a solid economy for the future

The Leader replied to Councillor Ashbee's comments with the following points:

- A common appreciation was shared for the efforts of the Council staff during this emergency situation.
- There was agreement that Uncle Mack should be called in; Councillors have the right to air their views and the Leader is looking forward to hearing them.
- The DCO decision was announced a few hours prior to the Council meeting and even normal arrangements for the Leader's speech wouldn't allow lengthy reflection on the matter. As the Secretary of State has overturned the Planning Inspectorate's decision on the application, it is expected that the decision will be challenged and that the uncertainty is not over. The Council will engage constructively with whichever decision comes from this.

Councillor Reverend Piper as leader of the Thanet Independents Party made the following points:

- Congratulations were shared to the officers of the council for their sterling efforts during this crisis. Commitment across all teams, including the finance team, refuse collection and even the digital team to keeping the Council running was noted.
- There was agreement that it had been a sad time for those in the community who have lost their loved ones to COVID-19 and gratitude was expressed to all local NHS staff and those in working in care homes for putting themselves on the frontline for our safety.
- The return to the Council Chamber to resume face-to-face discussions was eagerly anticipated.
- The Black Lives Matter demonstrations should not have been condoned by the Leader of the Council due to the current restrictions on public gatherings.
- The comments regarding racism in Thanet by another Councillor from the Labour group were disputed.

The Leader replied to Councillor Reverend Piper's comments with the following points:

- The holding of demonstrations in Thanet despite restrictions on public gatherings was problematic, yet they were lawful, orderly and not stopped by the police. It is not for the Council to stop these demonstrations if they do not break the law and this Council should respect them.
- Councillor Rawf intended to provide evidence for his comments and while generalisations were not helpful, the issue of racism (in Thanet and nationally) should not be denied.

Councillor Garner as Leader the Green Party made the following points:

- The Leader's sentiments were echoed and condolences were sent to those who had lost loved ones across Thanet. The efforts of the NHS staff should be suitably respected.
- The response by the Council staff who have continued to deliver essential services is commendable, including democratic services who have ensured that Members continue to meet virtually.
- Many across the district have been adversely affected by the pandemic shown by the increased need in food banks and voluntary groups springing into action to help those in need, alongside the district and the town councils.
- The Green Party was disappointed that £1.5m granted by the government was not directly used to help residents; the £2m earmarked for the Thanet Parkway station should be used to continue to deliver essential services.

- The recovery phase is an opportunity to review working practices in all areas of Council service delivery and will not only make accommodation savings but reduce our carbon footprint.
- The Black Lives Matter movement and the conversation this has provoked will lead to more open and honest debate around the issue of racism. The history and significance of the Uncle Mack plaque will be discussed further at the next Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting.
- The Manston DCO has ignored all facts considered by the examining authority, recent court rulings on the government's climate responsibilities, and the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the aviation sector. The decision will be challenged in the courts and will continue on into the future.
- It is positive to see work progress on the Pleasurama site. Thanet's special marine environment needs protection and an environmental inspection should have been done on this area.

The Leader replied to Councillor Garner's comments noting that:

- The new leader of the Green Party was welcomed.
- In regard to funding from the government, the Council has a considerable financial deficit due to the loss of revenue during this period and this money was needed to plug it.
- But a substantial amount of money has been spent on expenses relating to COVID-19, the exact figure of which will be announced at a later date.
- The decision to grant money for a Thanet Parkway station should remain. This substantial investment will not be spent elsewhere in the district if it is not spent on this. It is not just an extra stop but part of a vision to improve the local economy. Ultimately it will be Kent County Council's decision to agree to the investment.

#### **10. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Councillor Bayford, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, presented the report and the following points were noted

- The Workshop on the 24th of June was an opportunity for Members to put forward ideas for scrutiny. This was an encouraging meeting, with full attendance from the panel and a significant number of members of the Council were in attendance.
- A long list of items to consider has been created and will be brought back as a shortened list in due course
- The call in regarding the Uncle Mack decision has been well received and a rigorous debate on the subject will lead to the right decision.

Members noted the report.

#### **11. THANET LOCAL PLAN - INSPECTORS' REPORT (REG 25) AND ADOPTION (REG 26)**

After the Leader presented his report, it was proposed by the Leader and seconded by Councillor Bob Bayford and Members agreed by recorded vote the recommendations detailed in the report, namely to:

1. Adopt the Thanet Local Plan, subject to the modifications set out in the Inspectors' Report; and
2. Adopt the Landscape Character Assessment as a Supplementary Planning Document.

A recorded vote took place on this item due to the nature of the meeting being completely virtual.

The Monitoring Officer conducted a recorded vote on the motion as follows:

41 Members voted in favour of the motion: Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, J Bayford, R Bayford, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Currie, Day, Duckworth, Everitt, Farrance, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Pat Moore, Ovenden, Parsons, L Piper, Rev. S Piper, Pugh, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Savage, Scobie, Shrubbs, Taylor, Towning, Tomlinson, Whitehead, Wing, and Yates.

1 Member voted against the motion: Councillor Kup.

8 Members abstained from voting on the motion: Councillors Bambridge, Boyd, Dexter, Fellows, Paul Moore, Potts, Scott and Wright.

2 Members were unable to vote due to technical difficulties: Councillors Crittenden and Dennis.

The motion was carried.

## **12. DRAFT HOMELESSNESS, HOUSING AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

After the Deputy-Leader presented her report, it was proposed by the Deputy-Leader, seconded by the Councillor Everitt and Members agreed by recorded vote the recommendations detailed in the report, namely that:

1. Agree to adopt the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025, attached at annex 1.

A recorded vote took place on this item due to the nature of the meeting being completely virtual.

The Monitoring Officer conducted a recorded vote on the motion as follows:

50 Members voted in favour of the motion: Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Campbell, Coleman-Cooke, Currie, Day, Dexter, Duckworth, Everitt, Farrance, Fellows, Garner, Green, Gregory, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Kup, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, Ovenden, Parsons, L Piper, Rev. S Piper, Potts, Pugh, Rattigan, Rawf, Rogers, Roper, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Savage, Scobie, Scott, Shrubbs, Taylor, Towning, Tomlinson, Whitehead, Wing, Wright and Yates.

No Members voted against the motion.

No Members abstained from voting on the motion.

2 Members were unable to vote due to technical difficulties: Councillors Crittenden and Dennis.

The motion was carried.

## **13. MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2020/2021**

It was proposed by Chairman and seconded by the Vice-Chairman that the recommendations set out in the report be agreed, namely:

1. To note the comments of the EKJIRP and adopt the 2020/21 Members allowances scheme as set out at annex 1 to this report with effect from 1 April 2020.

There were no objections to this recommendation and it was agreed by all Members.

**14. CONFIRMATION OF INDEPENDENT PERSON AND THE INDEPENDENT CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

It was proposed by the Chairman, Seconded by the Vice-Chairman and Members agreed to the confirmation of the Independent Person and the Independent Chairman of the Standards Committee:

1. Mr Dennis James should be appointed as Thanet District Council's Independent Person for a new four term from this meeting.
2. Mr Peter Tucker should be appointed as the Chairman of the Standards Committee for a four year term from this meeting.

There were no objections to these recommendations and it was agreed by all Members

**15. OUTSIDE BODIES**

It was proposed by the Chairman, Seconded by the Vice-Chairman and Members agreed to the recommendation set out in the report, namely:

1. That Council agrees that Councillor Rattigan is appointed as representative to PATROL (Parking And Traffic Regulations Outside Of London)

There were no objections to these recommendations and it was agreed by all Members.

Meeting concluded : 7.20 pm

Leader's speech for council (Thursday, July 9th)

We meet tonight in circumstances that would have been unimaginable six months ago, connected by technology but unable to share the same physical space. Since the leader's speech must be supplied to group leaders in advance in any case, it seemed to me more efficient on this occasion to publish it publicly for everyone to read.

Since we last met at the end of February the council and the country have been through extraordinary times. As we begin to emerge from them, we must focus on the future. However, as this is our first full council meeting since February, it is right that we first reflect on what has happened in the intervening period.

First, I want to note with sadness that dozens of our residents have lost their lives to Covid-19, each case a tragedy for the family concerned. The council will want to extend its condolences to all of them. None was more poignant for our community than the loss of QEQM nurse Aimee O'Rourke at the beginning of April.

Whatever criticisms may be made of the government's handling of this epidemic, the bravery and sacrifice of staff in the NHS is beyond dispute. There are many other people working in frontline services, from shop staff to bus drivers and delivery workers, who have helped our community carry on. We should be grateful to them all.

The community itself, in the shape of numerous voluntary agencies and individual volunteers, has stepped up too, as have many of Thanet's town and parish councils. Ramsgate Town Council, in particular, can be proud of its service to the district as a whole in supporting the distribution of food parcels.

The challenge for this council was to play its designated role in the national framework while at the same time delivering its essential services. The regular collection of household waste and recycling became more important than ever, not just because residents were largely trapped at home, but because it showed society continuing to function.

I have said before, but it is important to do so again in this formal meeting, that the response of council staff at every level has been excellent, from the frontline to the back office or, as has more often been the case in recent months, the back bedroom. They have not just been doing their normal work, but in many cases going above and beyond that in service to the district. This is our opportunity as a council to recognise and thank them.

The first priority for all us has been the welfare of residents and TDC has played a vital role in coordinating between vulnerable individuals and the various third sector agencies. The council also contacted nearly 6,500 people in the government's shielded group, to make sure that each had a support network in place, and in hundreds of cases organised house calls where individuals could not be reached by telephone.

Providing suitable temporary accommodation for the homeless was a key priority from the start of the emergency and with local hotels unable to operate normally this was quickly

achieved, although the nature of the issue means that not everyone will accept or can remain in accommodation even when provided.

TDC has committed to ensuring excellence in this service even throughout a crisis situation; residents housed in this way have been moving into long term tenancies as soon as they were ready, and our homelessness team and RISE are working with all residents who are able to secure and maintain tenancies, and working to support all those who will need ongoing help in order to reach this point.

From the beginning of the crisis, the council was charged with supporting businesses through the distribution of government grants. Much of this work was done by Civica staff through our shared service arrangements, but with the oversight of our own finance team. TDC staff voluntarily took a proactive approach to try to contact businesses who were slow to take up the offer. More recently the council has itself delivered a discretionary grants scheme to try to assist those businesses who were not covered by the original payments.

Altogether we have paid out £32.5m to just over 3,000 local businesses over the space of three months, but we recognise that the task of rescuing our economy from the effects of lockdown does not end there. The safe re-opening of non-essential shops and, from July 4th, food and drink outlets is critical to supporting our economy and the jobs that depend on it. We have already seen a significant rise in unemployment locally.

Like the response phase of this emergency, the recovery phase requires adaptation and cooperation. Government has not always given local authorities the time they need to adapt to changes in the regulations. A good example was the change to the travel regulations, which gave us two days to prepare for the re-opening of beaches.

At the beginning of May we were being lobbied to suspend the annual dog restrictions because the beaches were unlikely to be used by visitors this summer; by the middle of the month we were facing a growing challenge from large numbers of people arriving when the timing of the lockdown had prevented us making normal provision for the summer season. In particular, we faced the challenge of opening public toilets safely and with additional cleaning staff. When we did, staff were abused and materials were stolen.

There were particular problems of litter, inconsiderate parking and people relieving themselves in public around some of our smaller beaches, which though not unique to Thanet are of particular concern to the local residents affected. We are grateful to the many volunteers who have helped us clean up after the beach users. The sheer volume of rubbish being left behind across all beaches remains a major challenge.

By June we were operating at peak summer resource levels, and in some cases above them. We have put in place a beach management plan which we will continue to adapt in the light of experience as the situation unfolds. Following the extraordinary numbers who visited Thanet on Thursday, June 25th, with an estimated 40,000 on Margate Main Sands alone, we convened a multi-agency meeting with police, RNLI, transport operators, KCC and the NHS to discuss how best to manage any future surge in numbers.

As a district council we are constrained in two directions, resources and authority. Most obviously we do not have the ability to close roads or beaches, even if that was perceived to be the right thing to do. I have noted that even authorities which asked visitors to stay away have been overwhelmed. The reality is that there are about 320 local authority areas in England alone and they cannot sensibly each have their own travel policy. Any public health intervention around travel to beaches must come from central government in order to be effective.

The opening of air bridges to overseas holiday destinations may mitigate some of the impacts on Thanet's beaches, and the opening of pubs, cafes and restaurants may divert some people who were previously using the beach, while the unpredictable British weather will have its own impact. However, the council will continue to prepare for exceptional numbers of beach visitors. As part of this, we have worked with the two local MPs to make a case to government for additional resources around the particular issues we face and I am grateful to them both for their constructive input and support on this matter.

As with every other local authority, the council's financial position has been severely affected, not just by extra expenditure related to Covid-19, but by loss of revenue from council tax, fees and charges and business rates. Our best estimate has been that we faced a budget shortfall of £5.5m, which has been offset by around £1.5m in government support and a further amount, unspecified at the time of writing, that is now expected.

It is disappointing, if unsurprising, that government support has not matched the "whatever it takes" rhetoric of the early weeks, but a report will come to cabinet at the end of July which will give a more detailed and accurate account of the financial position and how the council can address it, including drawing on its reserves.

It is still uncertain when the council will be able to meet again in person. I am nevertheless proud that thanks to our democratic services staff and digital team, our officers and members have been able to operate efficiently from home and that we were among the first to resume formal meetings and continue the everyday public business of the council.

Clearly these online meetings have limitations and frustrations, but the situation also provides opportunities to consider new ways of working for all of us. We will want to go back to the council chamber for formal meetings, but the fortnightly online member briefings have been a resounding success, with attendance well beyond the numbers we might expect for traditional sessions. I believe that these bring the council closer together, provide more opportunities for backbenchers to engage with senior officers and have demonstrated the cross-party commitment of councillors to represent their wards.

Another lesson that we have taken from the experience of using the technology is that there is an opportunity for senior officers and members to save time and money by no longer driving to some working meetings outside Thanet, and in some cases meetings at Margate. This is not only sensible but must form part of the council's response to the climate emergency. In the same way, where officers can work just as effectively remotely there is

potential to provide savings on council accommodation costs and a better work/life balance for staff. Some will always find it more practical to work in the office, and wish to do so, but the balance is likely to change as a result of the crisis, even when it is over.

Much else has happened in the last four and half months that I cannot cover here. The adoption, hopefully, of the local plan tonight is a landmark event. But there are two more things outside the currently dominant concern, or indeed council control, that I want to mention.

The first is the two large Black Lives Matters demonstrations that took place in Thanet in June. These were problematic because they took place in defiance of the Covid-19 regulations on public gatherings. However, they were substantial, dignified and orderly. We do not just have a legal duty, but a moral one, to challenge racism in society and anyone who has followed the Windrush scandal will know that it is very far from being eliminated. We must not pretend that racism does not exist in Thanet and I welcome Cllr Rawf's recent detailed response to South Thanet MP Craig Mackinlay on this point.

In this context I recently made a formal decision about the future of Uncle Mack's plaque in Broadstairs, and that has quite properly been called in by the overview and scrutiny panel. I look forward to hearing other members' views at that meeting.

The second thing I want to highlight is the start of building work on the former Pleasurama site in Ramsgate, 22 years after the original amusements burnt down. This prominent vacant plot has damaged Ramsgate seafront for two decades and been the source of endless frustration for residents and councillors for most of that time. It was a constant issue when I was an Eastcliff councillor between 2011 and 2015, although the land is now in private ownership and has been under third-party control for many years. Last week I went and spoke to the developers Blueberry Homes on site. The flats are going up fast and they expect to have the first occupiers move in next spring, with the whole development built out in 2-3 years.

This is a timely reminder that even the most stubborn problems do get resolved eventually. And tomorrow we are promised, again, a decision on the DCO for Manston. Even when circumstances are at their most difficult, things do eventually move on.