

19 JULY 1999

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 19 July 1999.

- p Cllr Mrs P A Wyeth - Chairman
- p Cllr A W Rice TD - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

- p Mrs S M Abernethy
- p K F Ault
- p K E Austin
- p E R Bowring
- p F J Bright
- p Mrs D M Brooks
- p D S Burdle
- e W R Catt
- p J E Coles
- p D E Cracknell
- p P H Cummings
- p B D Dash
- p J J Dawson
- p W H Dow
- p Miss P A Drake
- p T J Droogleever
- p L T Dunsdon
- p B C Earwicker
- p M H G Fidler
- p R L Frampton
- p Ms C F Gradidge
- p P C Greenfield
- p R C H Hale
- p L E Harris
- p F R Harrison
- p S A Hayes
- p J D Heron
- p Mrs M D Holding

Councillors:

- p Mrs A M Howe
- p J M Hoy
- p J A G Hutchins JP
- p M J Kendal
- p M C Kidman
- p G N D Locock
- p Mrs B M Maynard
- p Mrs M McLean
- p Mrs M Powell
- p G K Richardson
- p B Rickman
- p Mrs M J Robinson
- p B Rule
- p T M Russell
- p D N Scott
- p Lt Col M J Shand
- p S A Shepherd
- p Mrs B Smith
- p Mrs L P Snashall
- p G Spikins
- p M H Thierry
- p D B Tipp
- p J Waddington
- p M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- p Mrs D Wilson
- p C A Wise
- e P R Woods

Officers Attending:

I B Mackintosh, J Bateman, N J Gibbs, Mrs P Higgins, K Ireland, Ms E Malcolm, Mrs R Rutins, T R Simpson.

1. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 1999, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

(a) Queen's Birthday Honours

The Chairman was pleased to report the following people who had been recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Mr Philip Pearce-Smith who had served as a New Forest District Councillor from 1991 until May 1999 had been made an MBE for his services to the Lepe based League of Venturers Search and Rescue Operation.

Hampshire County Councillor Freddie Emery-Wallis had been made a CBE in recognition of his services to Hampshire during his 20 years as Leader of the County Council. In May 1999 Cllr Emery Wallis had been elected Chairman of Hampshire County Council.

Mr John Newton of Blissford had also been made a CBE. Mr Newton retired in March 1999 after 14 years as curator of the Southern Electric Museum, Christchurch.

The Council joined the Chairman in sending their congratulations to Mr Philip Pearce-Smith, Cllr Freddie Emery-Wallis and Mr John Newton.

(b) Sir Christopher Cockerell

The Chairman reported that on Monday, 12 July, accompanied by the Chief Executive, she had represented the Council at the memorial service to Sir Christopher Cockerell at Beaulieu Abbey.

(c) Examination Successes

The Chairman was pleased to report on examination successes from amongst Council employees. The Council prided itself on its training and development strategy which was seen as an investment in continuing to make the Council an organisation of excellence.

The Chairman reported that Sian Barber, Chief Executive's Department, and Stephenie Smith, Finance and Administration Directorate, had successfully achieved their first year in their undergraduate business programme. Karen Martin, Chief Executive's Department, had completed her post graduate certificate in Personnel and Development.

The Council joined the Chairman in congratulating these three members of staff on their achievements.

3. BUSINESS SERVICES CONTRACTS COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the meeting held on 18 June 1999.

On the motion that the report be received it was:-

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

4. CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the meeting held on 15 June 1999. On the motion that the report be received:-

(a) Information Technology Facilities for Members

Some members expressed concern at difficulties they were experiencing in contacting busy officers at the Council. They felt that every member should have direct access to officers via the IT Systems. Some members expressed concern that there was no timescale for Phase II of the project to extend IT facilities to all members requiring them.

It was moved and seconded that, subject to the existing Phase I implementation programme not being delayed, the item be referred back to the Central Services Committee for further consideration.

One member commented that the budget provision for this project had been fixed in previous years and the current administration wished to keep within that budget. Members were informed that IT facilities would be available to all members who required them within the next financial year.

Some members wished to have Council services connected to their own IT equipment. However, it was noted that whilst this was considered in the pilot scheme, it created a number of problems in supporting those members. In view of the number of members wishing to be connected to Council services it had been agreed that the best way was to introduce a two phase programme with the first phase in the current financial year and the second phase in the next financial year. This would ensure that there was no undue strain on finances or staffing resources and that the appropriate hardware would be available. It was noted that Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees together with the political group leaders and shadow spokespersons on committees were to be connected in the first phase.

The amendment was voted on and was lost.

(b) Annual Employee Training Report

A member questioned whether there was sufficient budget provision for safety training of employees. The Chairman of the Committee replied that he was pleased with the training and development strategy report and that there would be no reduction in the amount of training given to employees, but that the training would be accomplished in less time. Priority would be given to the expansion and effective use of Information Technology to assist employees to

reach their full potential. Members also noted that the performance and development interviews now assisted in ensuring that staff were trained in all areas.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the recommendation be adopted.

5. DIRECT SERVICES CONTRACTS COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the meeting held on 16 July 1999. On the motion that the report be received:-

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the meeting held on 16 June 1999. On the motion that the report be received:-

(a) Service Enhancement – Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance

A member enquired as to where the enhanced grass cutting would take place. The Chairman of the Committee replied that the new quick response squad would be able to be deployed wherever necessary in the district and would give the Council flexible resources to improve quality.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

7. HOUSING COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the meeting held on 28 June 1999. On the motion that the report be received:-

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

8. LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the meeting held on 1 June 1999. On the motion that the report be received:-

(a) Review of Revenue Expenditure and Income 1999/2000

Cllr Robinson declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item but as she had a dispensation to speak on the item but not to vote she remained present at the meeting.

Cllrs Dash, Gradidge, Kendal, McLean, Robinson, Smith, M S Wade and S S Wade all declared interests in this item as members of recreation centres.

A member enquired whether the impact of the new leisure facilities in Southampton had been taken into account when calculating income figures. The Chairman of the Committee replied that the figures were based on additional income already generated and from investments already made. To date there had been no significant impact on income from The Quays Leisure Complex.

(b) Clayfields Sports Centre, Dibden

A member commented that any subsidy given to the Sports Centre might create a precedent for the future. The Chairman of the Committee replied that a full report on the matter would be presented to the September meeting of the Committee.

(c) Ringwood Recreation Centre – Swimming Pool – Tiling

A member congratulated the staff on the turnout figures at this Centre despite the recent problems with the swimming pool tiling. The Chairman of the Committee replied that the staff had worked very hard and this was very much appreciated.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

9. PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the reports of the meetings held on 2 June, 7 July and 13 July 1999. On the motion that the reports be received:-

(a) Hampshire County Structure Plan Review – Proposed Modifications

A member asked why the Director of Environmental Services had been given delegated authority to ask the DETR to “call in” any planning application in relation to Dibden Bay and why parishes had not been consulted on the matter. The Chairman of the Committee replied that any formal applications for port development at Dibden Bay made by Associated British Ports (ABP) would be made under various different procedures. The main application was likely to be a Harbour Revision Order (HRO). Other applications could be a Transport and Works Act application relating to changes to the railway and a planning application for off-site highway works. It was only this planning application that would be made to the New Forest

District Council. The DETR had made it clear that it was their intention to bring all the applications together before a single public enquiry and that all decisions would be taken by the Secretary of State. For this to happen the Secretary of State would "call in" any planning application.

The purpose of giving delegated powers to the Director of Environment Services was to enable the process of consolidating all applications to proceed efficiently so that any local publicity given to residents and others about making representations on the applications would be clear and simple.

It would make no difference to the position of New Forest District Council with regard to the proposal and representations the Council might wish to make to the Secretary of State or at an enquiry. It would not affect the ability of the Council to engage in a dialogue with ABP to negotiate about any aspect of the proposal.

Even if the Council were minded to support port development it would not have been appropriate to have approved a planning application solely for highway works separately from a HRO and the Secretary of State would have intervened in the event.

(b) Railtrack Network Management Statement 1999

Some members commented on the need to ensure that the issues of increased freight transport versus the need to provide a passenger rail service along the waterside were considered as separate items.

The Chairman of the Committee replied that the intention was to ensure that a passenger rail service was supported and that this was not contingent upon any development of Dibden Bay.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be received.

10. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the reports of the meetings held on 30 June and 13 July 1999.

On the motion that the reports be received:

(a) Open Debates at Council Meetings

A member expressed concern at the proposal to discontinue the open debates at Council meetings. The following amendment was moved and seconded:-

- (a) That open debates at Council be discontinued with immediate effect and in their place the public participation scheme currently used in committees be extended to the Council with appropriate amendments;

(b) That the Council's Standing Orders be amended accordingly.

Some members stressed that the Government was currently seeking to increase public involvement in Councils affairs and discontinuing open debates at Council was not appropriate. The way forward was to involve the public more. Ceasing the open debates would deny the public the opportunity of addressing councillors on issues that they felt were important to them. Councillors should not be seen as too important to listen and discontinuing the open debates would be a retrograde and negative step. Some members acknowledged that there had been a low take up of people wishing to address the Council during the open debate sessions but the principle was an important one.

Other members supported the recommendation to discontinue the open debates. No genuine issues had been raised and the issues under discussion had never been sufficiently controversial. The open debates had not been the only way of hearing public opinion. The Council would need to consider changing its methods of consultation in the context of Best Value.

Members commented that assumptions were being made that if open debates were discontinued there would be no consultation at all. Existing methods of consultation via parish and district councillors were working well. The open debate sessions had led the false belief that the Council had the power to determine any issue.

In addition the public could attend any committee meeting and speak on any item and, whilst the Council needed to make sure that there was full and meaningful public participation, open debate sessions at Council meetings were not the most efficient or effective way of opening up local government to the public.

The Chairman of the Committee responded that the issue had been one of quality as well as quantity and it was important to ensure that public participation did not give the impression that the Council could do something that they could not subsequently deliver. It was more appropriate for the public to attend committee meetings and express their views directly on issues. Proposals would come forward in the future for genuine and extensive relationships between the public and the Council.

The amendment was voted on and was lost.

(b) Removal of Car Parking Charges for Town and Village Centre Car Parks

A member expressed disappointment that if the Committee's recommendation was adopted, the Council would not be asking visitors to contribute financially towards services and that the cost of these would fall on local taxpayers.

The following amendment was moved and seconded:-

- (1) That, in recognition of the fairness of raising income from visitors travelling from areas outside of our district, a Working Party be established to examine:-
 - (a) The levels of income being generated by charging visitors to park in our town and village centres;
 - (b) The effect of the visitor charging scheme on the viability of our town and village centres and the management of their car parks;
- (2) The Working Party considers further adjustment to the visitor charging scheme and in particular examines what further concessions could be made to residents living outside the district, in particular those living in the BH24 and SP6 postal code areas and the results be reported to the Planning and Transportation and Policy and Resources Committees.
- (3) No further action be taken to remove visitor parking charges from town and village car parks.

In accordance with Standing Order 14(15)(b) it was moved and seconded that the question be now put.

The Chairman was of the opinion that the matter before the meeting had been insufficiently discussed.

The mover withdrew the closure motion to allow a short period of debate.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting of the Council for 15 minutes.

At 8.15 p.m. the meeting resumed.

A member suggested that it would be more sensible to leave any decision on the car parking charges until the end of the holiday season. There were insufficient car parks in the district, they were all costly to run and charging helped to cover these costs. Another member commented that there was a moral obligation for visitors to pay something towards the Council's costs. The Government expected Councils to levy some charges for maintenance and the fairest way was to ask users to pay. The consequences of abandoning all charges would be severe.

Another member stated that local traders had asked the Council to remove charges. Ringwood Traders' Association had reported that within one month of the charges being introduced trade had fallen off. Lyndhurst Traders' Association and the Residents' Association were unanimous in their view that car park charges should be removed. The financial situation was insignificant as the Council had underspent by £1.4m in the last financial year. Another member commented that the issue should be considered in a neutral forum and should not be a political debate.

Under Standing Order 14(15)(b) it was moved and seconded that the question be now put. The Chairman was of the opinion that the matter before the meeting had now been sufficiently discussed.

The closure motion was voted on and was carried.

The Chairman of the Committee, as the mover of the original motion, commented that there were no proposals to remove charges in amenity car parks. The proposals to remove charges in town and village centre car parks was part of the policy to protect businesses in town and village centres. The Council and the public needed to realise that the operating costs of charging were estimated at £700,000 per annum.

The amendment was voted on and was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be received and the recommendations be adopted.

CHAIRMAN

(CL190799)