

28 APRIL 2003

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday 28 April 2003.

- p Cllr J M Hoy - Chairman
- p Cllr J A G Hutchins - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

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

Councillors:

- p P E Hickman
- p Mrs M D Holding
- e Mrs A M Howe
- p Mrs M Humber BA
- p M J Kendal
- p G N D Locock
- p Mrs B M Maynard
- p Mrs M McLean
- p B M F Pemberton
- p A W Rice TD
- p B Rickman
- p Mrs M J Robinson
- e B Rule
- p T M Russell
- p D N Scott
- p M J Shand
- S A Shepherd
- e Mrs B Smith
- p Mrs L P Snashall
- e G Spikins
- p M H Thierry
- p D B Tipp
- p M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- p C A Wise
- p P R Woods
- p Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

D Yates, C Malyon, G Ashworth, Ms J Bateman, Mrs R Rutins and J Ward.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllrs M S Wade declared an interest in Minute 58.

56. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2003, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

57. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

(a) Retiring Councillors

The Chairman, at the last full meeting of this Council, thanked all the current members of the Council for their service to the New Forest District. He also took the opportunity to say an official goodbye on behalf of all members and officers to those Councillors who were retiring at the local elections on Thursday 1 May. The Chairman was hosting a special reception on Friday 16 May at 12.00 noon for retiring Councillors.

The Chairman paid tribute to the following eleven retiring Councillors:

Councillor Carolyn Gradidge, the member for Dibden & Hythe North Ward, was elected to the Council in 1999 and had served on three committees.

Councillor Lee Dunsdon was elected to the Fawley and Holbury Ward in 1999 and had served on four committees.

Councillor Richard Frampton was also elected in 1999 to the Bransgore and Sopley ward. He had served on seven different committees and was the Vice-Chairman of the Leisure Review Panel until 2002. Cllr Frampton would also be remembered for his rather unusual fundraising calendar for the British Heart Foundation.

Councillor Sue Abernethy, the member for the Forest South Ward was elected to the Council in 1999. Cllr Abernethy had served on seven different Committees and Review Panels. She had also served on nine outside bodies.

Councillor Nick Locock was first elected in 1995 and re-elected in 1999 for the Downlands Ward. Cllr Locock had served on five committees and two outside bodies.

Councillor Geoff Spikins was first elected in 1991 and re-elected in 1995 and 1999 for the Colbury ward. Cllr Spikins had served on no less than seven different committees and panels and five outside bodies over the years. He had also been the Leader of the Independent Group.

Councillor Audrey Howe was first elected to the Blackfield and Langley ward in 1991 and re-elected in 1995 and 1999. Cllr Howe had served on seven committees and panels and had been the vice-chairman of the Leisure Services Committee in 1995/96. As well as somehow finding time to serve on twelve outside bodies, she had been Vice-Chairman of the Council in 1997/98 and had held the office of Chairman of the Council in 1998/99.

The Chairman said that Cllr Howe was sorry to miss her last Council meeting and members were updated on her unfortunate accident earlier that day whilst in hospital awaiting an operation. Members thoughts were with her and everyone wished her well.

Councillor John Dawson was first elected to the Totton North Ward in December 1985. Seeking and gaining re-election in 1987, 1991, 1995 and 1999, Cllr Dawson had served on nine committees and panels and seventeen outside bodies. He had been Chairman of the Leisure Services Committee from 1992 until 1999.

Councillor Brian Dash was retiring from the Council for a second time. Cllr Dash was first elected to the Dibden and Hythe North ward in 1983. Serving on three committees and two outside bodies during his term of office he did not seek re-election until a seat in the Dibden and Hythe North ward became vacant in 1994. Cllr Dash was re-elected again to that ward in 1995 and then in 1999 was elected for the Hythe South Ward. During that time he served on six different committees and panels, three outside bodies and had been chairman of the Corporate and Finance Review Panel in 2001/2002.

Councillor Simon Hayes was also retiring for the second time. Cllr Hayes was first elected to the Lymington Town ward in 1987 and was re-elected in 1995 and 1999. He had served on eleven different committees and panels and fifteen outside bodies. Cllr Hayes had been the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee from 1999 to 2001 and Vice Chairman of the Industrial Relations Committee from 2000 to 2002. He had been the Leader of the Council from 1999 until last November and was the Chairman of the Hampshire Police Authority.

Councillor Derek Burdle, the member for Netley Marsh Ward, had been one of the Council's longest-standing members, first elected in 1973 with seven subsequent re-elections. Cllr Burdle had served during his 30 years with this Council on fourteen different Committees and Panels and on 19 different outside bodies. He had been Chairman of the Development Committee from 1983 until 1989, the Vice-Chairman of the Council for two years from 1987 until 1989 and the Chairman of the Council for two years from 1989 until 1991.

The Chairman said that it was an honor and a pleasure to thank all the retiring members for the many years service that they had given the District and he wished them all the very best for the future. Members joined the Chairman in giving their eleven retiring colleagues a very well earned round of applause.

The Leader of the Council, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and other members added their thanks to the retiring Councillors for the contributions they had made to New Forest District Council.

58. REPORTS OF CABINET.

Cllr MS Wade declared a personal and prejudicial interest in (d) – 'Proposed Changes to the Council's Pay and Reward Strategy' in that his spouse was employed by the Council. He left the meeting during consideration of this matter.

The Chairman presented the Reports of the Cabinet meetings held on 5 March, 2 and 28 April 2003. On the motion that the report be received and the recommendations adopted:-

(a) Financial Report for the Period April 2002 – December 2002

In response to a question the Leader commented on the level of slippage in the capital programme. He pointed out that much of the slippage was due to external factors beyond the control of the Council and that the figures only represented a snapshot at one period in time.

(b) Unlawful Encampment of Gypsies and Travellers on Council Owned Land

A member commented that, whilst the introduction of a policy was a positive step it was also important that the rights of those people that suffered because of difficulties caused by gypsies and travellers were also considered. The costs of restoration following occupation by gypsies and travellers were a considerable burden to the district's residents.

Another member pointed out that there would soon be a requirement for specific designated sites for travellers and gypsies throughout the country and that this might address the problem. A number of members commented on the length of time that it still took to conclude proceedings before an eviction was possible. Some members felt that 'unlawful encampment' should be made a criminal offence. Other members were of the view that residents should be discouraged from trading with gypsies and travellers in order to deter them from remaining in an area.

One member commented that travelling was a natural way of life and an individual's choice should be respected. There were genuine travellers and gypsies and they should not be stigmatised by generalisations.

(c) Review of Members' ICT

The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder commented that this had been a very useful exercise. However, there were still some concerns over the use of the Citrex technology and the Portfolio Holder reported that this aspect would be re-examined.

(d) Proposed Changes to the Council's Pay and Reward Strategy

In moving this item the Chairman thanked the members of the Pay Panel and the Employee side for the hard work they had undertaken to reach an agreement. There had been a common goal to eradicate the low pay elements of the strategy. The additional funding proposed would enable elements of single status to be phased in earlier than anticipated.

A member questioned the difference in the amounts of mileage paid to members and officers. The Chairman reported that members were paid at the lowest rate recommended by the Secretary of State but that he would respond in detail to the member separately.

RESOLVED:

That the reports of the Cabinet dated 5 March, 2 April and 28 April 2003 be received and the recommendations adopted.

59. GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE.

The Chairman presented the reports of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held on 14 March and 28 April 2003. On the motion that the reports be received and the recommendations adopted it was:

RESOLVED:

That the reports be received and the recommendations adopted.

60. STANDARDS COMMITTEE.

The Chairman presented the report of the Standards Committee held on 4 April, 2003. In moving the report the Chairman proposed that Item 1 – Members' Allowances Scheme – Report by Independent Remuneration Panel be held over to the next meeting of the Council to give the new Council the opportunity to decide upon its own allowances.

RESOLVED:

That, with the exception of Item 1 – Members' Allowances Scheme – Report by Independent Remuneration Panel which would be held over to the next meeting of the Council, the report be received.

61. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' QUESTION TIME.

Question No. 1 from: Cllr Pemberton to Cllr Wise, Finance and Support Portfolio Holder

Would the Finance and Support Portfolio Holder please explain the implications to this Council of the recent changes by the Government in the method of annual grant funding to local authorities, in particular with regard to the likely effect on future Council Taxpayers' proportionate funding of the Council's total expenditure?

Answer:

The Government has reviewed the grant distribution system, focusing on the formula for distributing grant.

The grant system is designed so that if all local authorities were to spend at the level which the government thinks is appropriate (FSS) then the council tax at band D would be the same across the country. The review has led to significant reductions to the resources that are to be allocated to Councils in the South East of England.

To prevent the full effect of formula changes on grants to local authorities where the increase or decrease may have been significant, 'floors' and 'ceilings' have been introduced. This means that no local authority will receive less than a 3% or more than 12.5% increase in any one year

The overall external general grants (NNDR and RSG) received by the Council for 2003/04 was £10,058million. This was £58,000 more than last year. However, before calculating the 3% increase in grants from last year's base, an adjustment was first made to take out of the formula an element of grant paid towards the administration of housing benefits. This was paid as a separate direct grant and therefore the Government claim that our funding has increased by 3% but this change has been introduced at the same time as the introduction of a new tax credit regime. It is therefore impossible to assess at this stage whether the Council has or has not received an increase year on year of 3%.

This Council's FSS (Formula Spending Assessment) for 2003/04 has been increased by £5.88 million to £22.5 million and assumes a council tax of £180.00, against what the Council is proposing in a net budget of £19.068 million and a proposed council tax of £124.82. The Government is therefore trying to encourage this Council to increase its spending and raise more from its taxpayers. Furthermore central support to this Council will continue to fall behind the additional costs that it has to incur over which it has no control. Costs such as increased national insurance contributions, increased pension costs and reduced investment income.

This Council will continue to manage its finances effectively and minimise the impact of the Government's continued reduction in central support. Although the Government is attempting to redirect central taxation to local government this Council will do all it can to minimise the impact on our community many of whom are on fixed incomes.

Question No. 2 from: Cllr Catt to Cllr Wise, Finance and Support Portfolio Holder

Cllr Catt withdrew the following question:

Would Cllr Wise please explain the policy relating to the proposed increased charges for the use of various Council amenity facilities?

Question No. 3 from: Cllr Scott to Cllr Greenfield, Housing Portfolio Holder

Cllr Scott withdrew the following question:

Would the portfolio holder please detail the tenant participation arrangements and specifically the consultation process which occurred when the recent rent increase was discussed with tenants?

62. NEW FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN (REPORT B).

The Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder in moving this report said that this was the second of two rounds of public consultation on the First Stage Alterations to the Local Plan. The representations received were set out in Appendix 1 to Report B. A Pre-Inquiry meeting was set for 12 May 2003 with the Public Local Inquiry scheduled to start on 16 September 2003.

The Portfolio Holder was of the view that all of the proposed changes had been fully debated in a number of fora and nothing new that had been raised to warrant further changes. There would be a further opportunity for objectors to make representations at the Public Inquiry.

The Shadow Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder agreed that there were no exceptional circumstances requiring further consideration of the First Stage Alterations to the Local Plan at this time.

RESOLVED:

That, having considered the representations submitted at Revised Deposit stage, there were no exceptional circumstances that would justify issuing any further pre-inquiry changes.

63. DELEGATION OF POWERS TO OFFICERS (REPORT C).

RESOLVED:

That the amendments to the Scheme of Delegation of Powers to Officers, that are not the responsibility of the Cabinet, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report C be approved and adopted with immediate effect.

64. CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL.

RESOLVED:

That, in view of the local elections on 1 May 2003 and with the agreement of the Political Group Leaders, the deadline for receipt of nominations for Chairman of the Council be Thursday 8 May 2003.

CHAIRMAN