

15 DECEMBER 2003

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 15 December 2003.

- p Cllr J A G Hutchins - Chairman
- p Cllr Lt Col M J Shand - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

- p G Abbott
- E K F Ault
- P K E Austin
- P C Baker
- P G C Beck
- P Mrs J L Cleary
- E D E Cracknell
- P G F Dart
- P W H Dow
- P Miss P A Drake
- P M H G Fidler
- P Ms L C Ford
- P P C Greenfield
- P R C H Hale
- P C J Harrison
- P D Harrison
- P F R Harrison
- P J D Heron
- P D A Hibbert
- P P E Hickman
- P Mrs M D Holding
- P J M Hoy
- P Mrs M Humber
- P M J Kendal
- P Mrs B M Maynard
- P Mrs M McLean
- P M J Molyneux
- P R J Neath
- G J Parkes

Councillors:

- p B M F Pemberton
- p J Penwarden
- p L R Puttock
- p A W Rice TD
- p B Rickman
- p Mrs M J Robinson
- p B Rule
- p D J Russell
- p T M Russell
- E D N Scott
- E N E Scott
- P S A Shepherd
- P Mrs B Smith
- P Mrs L P Snashall
- P Mrs S I Snowden
- M H Thierry
- p A R Tinsley
- D B Tipp
- p Mrs B Vincent
- p M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- p G M Walmsley
- p J G Ward
- p A Weeks
- e Dr M N Whitehead
- p C A Wise
- p P R Woods
- p Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

D Yates, N Gibbs, C Malyon, Ms J Bateman, Miss G O'Rourke and Mrs R Rutins.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of interest were made by any members in connection with any agenda item.

42. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2003, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

43. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

(a) Cllr John Coles

The Chairman reported with great sadness the death of Cllr John Coles who had died suddenly on Monday 24 November 2003 after a short illness.

Cllr Coles who was 74 years of age, was also a Hampshire county councillor. He was a Liberal Democrat representative for the Holbury and North Blackfield ward. He was a motive force behind the Liberal Democrat group on this Council and Leader of the Council when that Group held power between 1993 – 1999. He was also Chairman of the Council from 1983 – 1985 and again from 1991 – 1993.

John Coles and his wife, Kathy, lived in Fawley, where he worked in the refinery complex from 1957 until his retirement in 1993. He and his wife both became involved in community life. Apart from his NFDC and HCC roles, he served on the national Local Government Association.

Cllr Coles served on many committees and other organisations during his time on the Council.

Other members paid tribute to Cllr Coles. Cllr Kendal said that he had been an outstanding Leader and member of the District Council and he had also enjoyed working with him at the County Council. Cllr Robinson said that he was a devoted family man with a remarkable list of achievements.

Members and Officers joined the Chairman in standing for a minute's silence in memory of Cllr John Coles.

(b) Chairman's Charity

The Chairman was pleased to announce that he had sent a cheque in the sum of £2,600 to Lymington Sailability towards the cost of a new Windrider 17 craft.

A further £2000 was raised by the Council's pro-am golf tournament in the summer; £300 raised through a sponsored swim by the students of Coxlease School; £250 was donated by Desmond Swayne M.P; and £50 donated by Ray Luck a local musician.

(c) Cllr Bob Hale

Members joined the Chairman in welcoming back Cllr Hale from Georgia. Cllr Hale was a member of an international team who, on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, went to Georgia to observe the democratic process in the parliamentary elections.

44. REPORT OF CABINET.

The Chairman presented the report of the Cabinet held on 5 and 13 November and 3 December 2003. On the motion that the report be received and the recommendations adopted:

(a) Proposed amendments to the District of New Forest (Off Street Parking Places) Order

In moving the report the Chairman said that the £5 charge for the parking clock was lower than that charged in other authorities. The £5 fee was levied to cover the administration and delivery of the scheme and any surplus would be used to fund decriminalisation arrangements and the management of On Street car parking.

The aim of the scheme was to charge motorists and not the council tax payer. The income from the parking clocks in the budget would be of more benefit to the council tax payer rather than them receiving a free clock. The Cabinet therefore confirmed the price of the clock. However, HCC had said that the payment should be reviewed in a year.

Other members then spoke.

Some members said that they thought the scheme was about traffic management rather than raising income. Residents had previously had free parking and were now paying. Another member said that whilst there was some benefit to council tax payers, had the previous scheme remained, there would have been an additional £2m income received over the past 4 years. Other members said that there was nothing in the new scheme that could not have been achieved by modifications to the previous scheme. The new scheme did not address traffic management issues but was about raising income. Tourists expected to pay car parking charges, but this was a form of double taxation on council tax payers.

One member said that the new system had been accepted in towns and villages and was thought to be fairer.

In response the Chairman said that some council tax payers did not own cars and were therefore subsidising those that did. The new scheme was a proper system that targeted road users. The charge for the parking clock would help to cover the costs of introducing the new traffic management regulations for On Street car parking and car parks.

(b) Expenditure Plan Proposals

The Chairman said that the Council had received a poor settlement from the Government for the second year running. The expenditure plan proposals would need to be carefully scrutinised.

45. APPOINTEMENTS TO REVIEW PANELS.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Councillor Penwarden be appointed to the Crime and Disorder Review Panel in place of Cllr Beck; and
- (b) That Councillor Cleary be appointed to the Leisure Review Panel in place of Cllr Beck.

46. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' QUESTION TIME.

Question No. 1 from : Cllr S S Wade to Cllr Heron, Portfolio Holder, Economy and Planning

"Can you please confirm in total, the initial cost of implementing the original car parking scheme by the previous administration, plus the cost of abolition of that scheme and the estimated cost of the implementing the proposed new scheme?"

Answer:

The Portfolio Holder replied that the cost to this Council of the Liberal Democrats parking scheme was a matter of public record. If Councillor Wade wished to know the figures, they were available. The cost to the local economy was another matter. The Portfolio Holder did not think that it could be estimated but local businesses well remembered the effects that that ill thought through scheme had upon them.

With regard to the proposed traffic management scheme, the Portfolio Holder said that the consultancy fees would amount to approximately £26,000 with a predicted net cost for the year of £39,000.

In response to a supplementary question the Portfolio Holder said that he did not agree that to revoke the old scheme and implement the new scheme had been a waste of money. The original scheme had been ill thought out and had been damaging to businesses.

Question No. 2 from : Cllr P R Woods to Cllr Kendal, Portfolio Holder, Policy and Strategy

"Will the Council Leader please explain the Council's strategy for dealing with the new power available to District Councils to modify the council tax discount on second homes?"

Answer:

The Portfolio Holder replied that the Council Tax bill for any dwelling currently varied according to the occupancy i.e.

- 2 or more persons living there pay 100%
- 1 person living there pays 75%
- Where no one lives there (second homes and empty property), only the 50% property element was currently payable.

The Regulations provided that a billing authority may reduce the Council Tax discount from the nationally set 50% to a minimum 10% in some or all of its area, except where the liable person was required to live in job related accommodation as part of his job.

Where a Billing Authority chose to reduce the second home discount both the billing authority and the precepting authorities (the County Council, Police, Fire Authorities and Local Councils) would benefit from the increase in the tax base. The tax base used in the calculations of the revenue support grant would not be increased.

This meant that any additional proceeds raised locally by virtue of a Billing Authority's decision to reduce the second homes discount would be shared with the precepting authorities in proportion to their Council taxes (and not be off-set by a corresponding reduction in government grant).

Approximately, 85% of any additional income raised would pass to the major precepting authorities (County, Police and Fire) because their Council taxes accounted for the major part of the Council Tax Bill. However, any additional administration costs would fall on the billing authority.

The Portfolio Holder said that it had now been established that there were currently 1756 Band D equivalent second homes in the District.

If the discount on all second homes in the District was reduced from the nationally set 50% to a locally determined 25% or 10% the additional annual income (based on current Council Tax levels) was estimated as follows:-

	25%	10%
	£000	£000
County	363	581
Police	42	67
District	54	86
Total	459	734

There were undoubtedly some common priorities between district councils, the County Council and the Police Authority such as Social/key worker housing; Community safety/wardens and Transportation issues.

With the change to Social Housing Grant Regulations the ability of district councils to fund social housing was constrained and was therefore a potential priority for most. In order to maximise the potential benefit to the community it was proposed that the District Council enter into an agreement with the County Council to pass the additional income generated (less any administrative costs) through a registered social landlord to invest in shared equity low cost housing.

The Portfolio Holder said that it was also proposed that if agreement could be reached on the above approach then receipts from the sale of the equity element of the property would be recycled in order to generate further low cost housing. This would clearly require local authorities to work closely with an RSL but should enable a funding stream to be developed in order to meet an area of significant demand that had been exacerbated by the number of second homes in the District and one that the Council was unable to meet within the resources currently available.

Question No. 3 from : Cllr L R Puttock to Cllr Michael Thierry, Portfolio Holder Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder give an early indication of the take-up of the district-wide voluntary vehicle collection scheme?”

Answer

This question was withdrawn.

47. COUNCIL TAX BASE (LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003 SECTION 84) AND SECOND HOMES AND LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTY HOMES (SECTION 11A LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1992 INSERTED BY SECTION 75 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003).

The Council at their meeting in December would usually be asked to approve the Council Tax base for the following year. The Local Government and Finance Act 1992 had been amended. For 2004/2005 only the period in which the tax base had to be set was changed to run from 20 December 2003 to 31 January 2004.

RESOLVED:

That a special meeting of the Council be agreed to take place on Monday 26 January 2004 at 6:30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN