

19 JULY 2004

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 19 July 2004.

p Lt Col M J Shand - Chairman
p Sqn Ldr B M F Pemberton - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

G Abbott
p K F Ault
p K E Austin
p C Baker
p G C Beck
p Mrs J L Cleary
p D E Cracknell
p G F Dart
p W H Dow
p Miss P A Drake
p L T Dunsdon
p M H G Fidler
p Ms L C Ford
p P C Greenfield
p R C H Hale
p C J Harrison
e 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 J A G Hutchins
p M J Kendal
p Mrs B M Maynard
p Mrs M McLean
p M J Molyneux

Councillors:

p R J Neath
p G J Parkes
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
T M Russell
p D N Scott
p N E Scott
p S A Shepherd
p Mrs B Smith
p Mrs L P Snashall
p Mrs S I Snowden
p M H Thierry
p A R Tinsley
p D B Tipp
e Mrs B Vincent
e M S Wade
p S S Wade
p G M Walmsley
p J G Ward
p A Weeks
e Dr M N Whitehead
e C A Wise
p P R Woods
p Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

D Yates, N Gibbs, Mrs P Higgins, J Mascall, Ms J Bateman, Miss G O'Rourke and Mrs R Rutins.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

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

15. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2004, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

16. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

(a) Mr Peter Crabb

The Chairman announced, with great sadness, the death last Tuesday of a past employee, Pete Crabb, at the age of 59 after a long illness.

Pete had been located at the Town Hall, Lymington. He had joined NFDC in June 1974 as Senior Quantity Surveyor. Latterly he was Assistant Director, Support Services and then Acting Director of Technical Services. He retired in July 1997 but came back on a consultancy basis two or three times afterwards, until he became ill.

Pete had been a larger than life character, always smiling and helpful, and would be fondly remembered and sadly missed. A memorial service was to be held on Tuesday, 27 July at 2.30pm at All Saints Church, Milford-on-Sea, followed by refreshments, to which everyone was welcome. Any donations in Pete's memory could be made to Oakhaven Hospice.

Members joined the Chairman in standing for a moment of silence in memory of Pete Crabb.

(b) The Forest Forge Theatre Company

The Chairman was pleased to announce that Dominic Phillips, the Stage Manager at The Forest Forge Theatre Company, had been named the individual stage manager of the year at the Stage Management Association Award ceremony in London.

The award had been presented by HRH The Duke of Wessex & Sir Timothy West.

Forest Forge was revenue funded by the Council and the Council had supported them for many years. This was another example of the quality of work that they consistently achieved. They were taking high quality professional theatre and workshops to many venues across the District.

Members joined the Chairman in congratulating Dominic on his success.

(c) Birthday Honours

The Chairman was pleased to announce that two residents had been recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Dr Victoria Edwards of Lyndhurst, a Board Member for the Countryside Agency, had been given an OBE for services to the Environment.

Also from Lyndhurst, Dr Maureen Coombs who was a Consultant Nurse in Critical Care Nursing at Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust, had received an MBE for services to the NHS.

The Chairman also congratulated Hampshire County Council's Chief Education Officer Andrew Seber who had been made a CBE for his services to education.

(d) Retirement of Mr Malcolm Eastwood and Appointment of Mr John Bonney

On behalf of all Members the Chairman expressed his thanks and sent best wishes to Hampshire Fire and Rescue's Chief Fire Officer Malcolm Eastwood. Mr Eastwood had retired after many years of dedicated service and had spent the last nine years as the County's Chief Fire Officer

The Chairman welcomed his successor, Mr Bonney, who had been Hampshire's Deputy Chief Fire Officer. Mr Bonney took up the post at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service on 1st July.

(e) "New Forest Fillies"

The Ladies-only Cancer Research 'Race for Life' had been held at Southampton Common on Sunday 18 July 2004. 10,000 women of all ages ran and walked to raise money for Cancer Research UK. Among them were two councillors, 25 employees and 3 of their daughters who made up the New Forest District Council's team the 'New Forest Fillies'.

Many members and officers and their families had sponsored the team and they estimated that they would have raised over £1,800. Members joined the Chairman in congratulating female colleagues on their achievement for this very worthy cause.

17. REPORT OF CABINET.

The Chairman presented the report of the Cabinet dated 2 June and 5 July 2004. On the motion that the report be received and the recommendations adopted:

(a) Financial Strategy 2005/2008

The Leader of the Opposition said that as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review there would be grave implications for Council Tax rises next year. She asked if any consideration had yet been given to the specific implications for NFDC.

The Leader agreed that there would be severe implications for the Council. The Government's three year spending programme assumed that council tax would rise by at least 7% year on year. However any increase in council tax above 5% would result in capping. The Government therefore expected the additional income to be made by efficiency savings. However, for this Council, many of the E government efficiency savings suggested had already been made and were built into the budget.

(b) Decriminalisation of On Street Parking

In response to a question relating to the disposal of end of life vehicles, the Environment Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council had had to suspend the voluntary surrender scheme for such vehicles. Any abandoned vehicles collected by the Council would now need to be stored until the issues surrounding their disposal/recycling were resolved.

The Leader said that in relation to decriminalisation, discussions were now taking place with Town and Parish Councils regarding regularisation of on-street parking in order to prevent problems of displacement. In terms of funding he said that there had been a lower than expected contribution from the County Council towards the set up costs and as a result there was a shortfall. The clock charges would now need to be reviewed and the Cabinet would consider a report on this issue in the near future.

As part of the decriminalisation process the Council were required to become a member of the National Parking Adjudication Service (NPAS). It was proposed that Councillor Heron be appointed as the Council's representative on the Joint Committee responsible for running the service.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report of the Cabinet dated 2 June and 5 July 2004 be received and the recommendations be adopted; and
- (b) That the Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder be appointed as this Council's representative on the National Parking Adjudication Service Joint Committee.

18. REPORT OF COMMERCIAL SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE.

The Vice-Chairman, Cllr Thierry, presented the report of the Commercial Services Joint Committee dated 17 June 2004. On the motion that the report be received:

- (a) Director's Report for the period 1 April to 31 March 2004 – Operational Issues

In response to a question the Leader confirmed that, in relation to the application for an Operator's Licence to locate additional refuse vehicles at Claymeadow Depot, the Cabinet had said they would not make a decision until an Environmental Impact Study had been carried out. Officers had instigated a Study that, when completed, had raised sufficient concerns for them to withdraw the application without the need for the Cabinet to make a decision.

RESOLVED:

That the report of the Commercial Services Joint Committee dated 17 June be received.

19. REPORT OF GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE.

The Chairman presented the report of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee dated 9 July 2004. On the motion that the report be received and the recommendation adopted it was:

RESOLVED:

That the report of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee dated 9 July be received and the recommendation adopted.

20. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' QUESTION TIME.

Question No. 1 from : Cllr Pemberton to Cllr Beck, Portfolio Holder, Crime and Disorder

"Would the Portfolio Holder please recite the benefits to be derived by the public from the introduction of Community Wardens?"

Answer:

The Portfolio Holder replied that, in his Spending Review speech to The Commons last Monday the Chancellor had said: "There is a clear consensus among the people of this country that to modernise the way in which we tackle crime and the fear of crime we need, on our streets, not just policemen and women but community support officers and wardens at the heart of each neighbourhood who can also patrol our streets, build links with local people and prevent anti-social behaviour."

As the topic of Community Wardens was so vast the Portfolio Holder said he would write to all members with details of the work currently being undertaken by the Working Group, to include basic details of the Community Warden Project that has been put together so far.

The Portfolio Holder said that this was a well executed and managed project that was being undertaken and developed by a very dedicated cross party working group at the request of the Cabinet. The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder had attended the Crime and Disorder Review Panel during their early discussion regarding the investigations of a Community Warden Scheme. He had strongly recommended that a comprehensive business plan and budget should be prepared and presented to the Cabinet for their consideration.

In pursuance of that recommendation it was anticipated that a business plan and budget would be presented to Cabinet at their November/December meeting. The draft working document of the business plan would be circulated to all members prior to this to ensure that all members had the detailed information. Members' constructive comments would be welcomed. If Councillors themselves wished to become involved in the development of the project they would need to approach the Chairman of the Crime and Disorder Review Panel direct.

In answer to a supplementary question asking what had the Project Team achieved so far, the Portfolio Holder said that he would detail their work in his written response to members but that the Team had specifically identified New Milton and Hythe and Dibden as target areas.

Question No. 2 from : Cllr Tipp to Cllr Heron, Portfolio Holder, Economy and Planning

"Would the Portfolio Holder please tell us his views of the recommendation in annexe one to the recently published South Hampshire Study Report, which calls for South Hampshire to become a Strategic Development Area, focusing on increased levels of growth in population, housing and industry over the next twenty years?"

Answer

The Portfolio Holder replied that the East Dorset, South Hampshire and Isle of Wight Sub-Regional Study, which called for South Hampshire to become a Strategic Development Area, was a statement from the local authorities that comprised PUSH: Partnership for Urban South Hampshire. PUSH consisted of the six local authorities whose areas comprised the urban core of South Hampshire ie: Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport and Havant Borough Councils; Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils and Hampshire County Council. This Council, along with Test Valley Borough Council and Winchester City Council had not been involved in discussions to join the PUSH group.

SEERA (the South East Regional Assembly) was now in the course of commissioning the preparation of a sub-regional strategy for South Hampshire. The strategy area, as defined by SEERA, ran from the eastern New Forest National Park boundary to the Sussex border. The Portfolio Holder said that he understood that SEERA would commission this work from HCC and Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, as these were the strategic planning authorities with a statutory duty to advise SEERA on sub-regional planning. However, representatives of all councils affected, including this Council, would be involved in developing the Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder said that he represented the Council on the member Steering Group and would seek to ensure that this Council's interests were protected and, in particular, that such development as was required in the sub-region was focused on the main urban core and did not result in unwelcome and harmful development on the edge of the New Forest National Park.

In a supplementary question Cllr Tipp said that on the current levels of growth over the next 20 years there would be a further 68,000 new houses built in South Hampshire. Currently there were over 800,000 properties empty across the country. The flow from north to south needed to be halted. The Portfolio Holder endorsed the comments made and said he would fight the proposals to make South Hampshire a Strategic Development Area.

Question No. 3 from : Cllr Mrs Robinson to Cllr Kendal, Portfolio Holder, Policy and Strategy

“Would the Leader explain the process of consultation leading to the announcement that Hampshire County Council has agreed a 20% increase in the charge for parking clocks for NFDC car parks for 2005?”

Answer

In response the Portfolio Holder said that the District Council had power under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to provide parking places and, by Order, to make provision as to their use, charges, conditions etc. However, the Council could not exercise those powers without the County Council's consent. Such consent may have conditions attached to it. Any decision made by the County Council had to be reasonable.

The County Council had asked for additional information so that they could review the parking order. They had sent a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions, one of which related to the price of the annual clock. Consultants were engaged and a wide ranging consultation process was entered into with the public. Price sensitivity was measured for a system to replace the 'free first permit' that had previously applied.

If required to pay, the overwhelming response was for a charge of either £5 or £7.50 per year, with the majority then favouring £5. It was therefore felt that any charge much in excess of that would be unacceptable by the residents and voters of the New Forest.

The disadvantage of a free card clock for residents with non residents being charged meant that the administration became complex and almost impossible to police effectively. The fraudulent use of free clocks being sold on to non-residents and replaced etc would require extraordinarily expensive measures to ensure prevention.

A charge of £5 per clock plus the revenue generated by the meter income was sufficient to pay for additional enforcement, and allow for the car parking account to show a healthy surplus instead of its former deficit. It also meant that the Council Tax Payers who did not own a car, some 10,000, were not subsidising car park account costs. The extra surplus income would help the considerable cost (£800,000 per year) of concessionary travel being given to old-aged pensioners,

young people, etc, in the New Forest. Furthermore, the low cost of the permit would encourage people to use car parks rather than parking in side streets to avoid car park charges. The other important advantage was that if a tourist purchased a car park clock, he was not discouraged, by high meter charges, from using village shops and there was no financial advantage to him in driving to a supermarket for free parking.

Community centres which relied on cross boundary users (who under the former system could not obtain permits) were being disadvantaged in Lyndhurst and Ringwood under a closed "residents" only permit system.

Therefore, the price sensitive nature of the car parking clock suggested that if the price was too high, people would not purchase the clock and would not park in the village car parks but park in the side streets. When decriminalisation procedures had run their course, the District Council would employ additional Car Park Wardens and would install meters in the streets surrounding car parks in particular to prevent that type of abuse. At that point a higher charge for the clock would be justifiable on the grounds that it would have wider usage than at present.

Further charges in respect of exclusive parking for employees of traders in some of the Council's car parks in a zoned area would also be considered and implemented particularly in places such as Ringwood. All these additional revenues would be used within the Council's transport budget to try to reduce congestion and promote "Cango" style bus services as a network between villages and towns. At this stage, therefore, the Portfolio Holder said he could see no reason for a change in the price of the car park clock. Indeed he believed that such an increase would be counter productive to the Council's medium and long term plans. However, in view of the fact that the Council had expected a larger contribution towards the decriminalisation initial costs, a modest increase in the price of the clock from £5 to say £6 to help mitigate this loss of expected grant from the County may need to be considered. The grant which Eastleigh Borough Council had received was £125,000 and Havant Borough Council £100,000. As NFDC was considerably larger than both of those borough councils, with many more town and village areas to regulate and enforce, the costs to introduce decriminalisation in the New Forest would be significantly greater. The Council hoped that the County Council would reconsider this level of funding in order to ensure that the scheme remained a viable option for this Council. If the implementation costs were not fully funded by the County Council the District would need to evaluate how this may impact on overall traffic management proposals.

The Cabinet would study the response from HCC as set out by their Executive Member for the Environment and report back to the Council with their recommendation.

In response to a supplementary question asking the Portfolio Holder to agree that the announcement was premature and that members should have been involved in the consultation process, the Leader said that it was difficult to ensure that announcements from different bodies were timed to coincide. NFDC had yet to make their decision.

Question No. 4 from : Cllr Hickman to Cllr Beck, Portfolio Holder, Crime and Disorder

"As anti-social behaviour is perceived as the number one threat to social well-being by citizens, could the Portfolio Holder inform us what measures are currently in place and planned in order to combat anti-social behaviour in the New Forest district, and what strategies are being employed to support young people involved in such behaviour?"

Answer

The Portfolio Holder replied that this Council were presently engaged in a Crime Audit Consultation that would give information on the perceptions, priorities and concerns of the New Forest Community including the threats, if any, that they may feel.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was felt by some to be a threat however it was imperative that this must be considered in context – the New Forest was and remained one of the safest and loveliest places to live in the UK. The first important measure that the Council was taking was to keep things in perspective and the work that was being done tackled both the behaviour of identified individuals and the issues in certain geographical locations. Under the Community Safety Partnership, of which NFDC was a statutory partner, behavioural issues were tackled by “Divided We Fall” and geographical issues were tackled by “PRIME” (Problem Resolution in a Multi Agency Environment).

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Community Safety Strategy included a priority to tackle ASB and this was delivered through partnership working and projects funded by the Home Office. The Council were required to submit a strategy for tackling ASB related to its housing and this would be ready by December 2004. It would work in partnership with the Community Safety Strategy. The Licensing Policy also required consideration to be given to drink related ASB.

The Portfolio Holder said that anti-social behavioural issues with locations or individuals were rarely solved using enforcement and it was important that the Council continued to engage in meaningful partnership working as well as ensuring that appropriate action was able to be taken where necessary.

In response to a supplementary question the Portfolio Holder said that he would address the measures that were being taken to monitor the incidence of ASB in his written reply to members.

21. DELEGATION OF POWERS TO OFFICERS.

The Council considered changes to the Scheme of Delegations to Officers.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Scheme of Delegation to Officers relating to functions which are not the responsibility of the Cabinet be amended as set out in Appendix 1 to the Agenda; and

- (b) That, in addition to the changes set out in Appendix 1, the terms "Solicitor" and "L Moore – Solicitor" be replaced by "Solicitor or Employed Barrister" throughout the Scheme of Delegation and Proper Officer Appointments.

22. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE.

The Council considered the establishment of a separate committee to deal with the final accounts.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a Final Accounts Committee be appointed comprising the following 5 members:

Councillors:

C Baker
A R Tinsley
S S Wade

Councillors:

J G Ward
C A Wise

with the following terms of reference:

"To approve the Authority's statement of accounts, income and expenditure and balance sheet or record of receipts and payments (as the case may be) under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003";

- (b) That the Committee meets on an ad hoc basis as and when required; and
- (c) That the terms of reference of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee be amended by the deletion of paragraph 6.

23. CORPORATE OVERVIEW PANEL.

RESOLVED:

That the following members be appointed to serve on the Corporate Overview Panel:

Councillors:

C Baker
Mrs J L Cleary
Miss P A Drake
F R Harrison
Mrs M Humber
R J Neath
Sqn Ldr B M F Pemberton

Councillors:

Mrs M J Robinson
Mrs B Smith
A R Tinsley (Vice-Chairman)
J G Ward (Chairman)
Dr M N Whitehead
P R Woods
Mrs P A Wyeth

CHAIRMAN