

18 SEPTEMBER 2006

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 18 September 2006.

- p Cllr D N Scott - Chairman
- p Cllr W H Dow - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

- p G Abbott
- p K F Ault
- e K E Austin
- p C Baker
- p G C Beck
- p Mrs J L Cleary
- p D E Cracknell
- p G F Dart
- p L T Dunsdon
- p M H G Fidler
- p Ms L C Ford
- p Mrs L P Francis
- p P C Greenfield
- e R C H Hale
- p C J Harrison
- D Harrison
- p F R Harrison
- p L Harris
- p J D Heron
- 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
- p R J Neath

Councillors:

- p G J Parkes
- p Sqn Ldr B M F Pemberton
- p J Penwarden
- e L R Puttock
- p A W Rice TD
- p B Rickman
- e Mrs M J Robinson
- p B Rule
- p D J Russell
- p T M Russell
- N E Scott
- p Lt Col M J Shand
- p S A Shepherd
- e Mrs B Smith
- p Mrs S I Snowden
- e M H Thierry
- p A R Tinsley
- p D B Tipp
- p C R Treleaven
- 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
- e Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

D Yates, J Mascall, C Malyon, Mrs M Dunsmore and Mrs R Rutins.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

The following members declared interests in the items mentioned:

Cllr Kendal – Item 2 of the Report of the Cabinet dated 6 September – Parking Clock Charges 2007/08.

Cllrs Dart, Mrs Francis, Harris, F R Harrison, Molyneux, Rice, D Russell, Shand, Shepherd and Weeks - Item 3 of the Report of the Cabinet dated 6 September – Eling Tide Mill: The Next Steps.

29. MINUTES (PAPER A).

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2006, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

There were none.

31. ALLOCATION OF SEATS ON COMMITTEES TO POLITICAL GROUPS (REPORT B).

Councillor Harris expressed concern that although the Liberal Democrat group had won a seat from the Conservatives at the Totton West by-election, the allocation of seats to the Liberal Democrat Group had not changed. They had fewer seats on Committees and Panels in percentage terms compared with their number of seats on the full Council. He proposed the following motion that was seconded by Cllr Weeks:

That the size of the Review Panels be increased by one seat to better reflect the political proportionality of the Council.

The Chief Executive advised that the current arrangements were in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. He stated further that if the Council wished to review the number of seats on Committees and Panels, the issue would have to be referred to the Cabinet for consideration.

The Leader of the Council said that the overall change to the political proportionality in percentage terms following the by-election was only 1.67%. He further stated that he considered the makeup of seats to be fair, in that as the leading group, the Conservatives were entitled to maintain an overall majority on Committees and Panels. The Council's constitution provided a call in procedure which allowed members of the Council to examine all executive decisions and increasing the numbers of members of the Review Panels would have little benefit. Practically, a change in the membership of the Panels at this late stage of the calendar year would seem illogical, considering the expense that it would cause.

Some members spoke in favour of Cllr Harris's motion as they considered that the current system was unfair, especially given that the Review Panels had both a Conservative Chairman and Vice-Chairman. This was seen to be contrary to the ethos behind scrutiny. They further considered maintaining a majority of two on the Review Panels was an abuse of power by the administration.

Other members felt that the Council's Review Panels functioned effectively and that the Chairmen of the Panels dealt with the process of scrutiny fairly. All views, regardless of political affiliation, were taken into account.

Cllr Weeks argued that the size of the Council's Committees and Panels should be altered to better reflect the political makeup of the Council as a whole. He argued that although the Council might be acting in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act, the administration was taking an immoral stance in this interpretation of how the seats on the Council's Committees and Panels were allocated.

Cllr Harris appealed to the Council to consider whether the current system was fair to the electorate.

Cllr Harris's motion was put to the vote and was lost.

32. REPORTS OF CABINET.

Cllr Kendal, the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Cabinet, presented the reports of the meetings held on 2 August and 6 September 2006.

On the motion that the report be received and the recommendations adopted:

(a) Financial Report – Forecast Full Year and Actual for the Period April 2006 to June 2006

In response to a query regarding the need for a supplementary estimate because of the use of developer's contributions for a large part of the cost of land drainage at Lloyd Avenue, Marchwood, it was confirmed that this was an extra budgetary item and therefore a supplementary estimate was required.

(b) Parking Clock Charges 2007/08

Cllr Kendal declared a personal interest in this item as a member of Hampshire County Council. He did not consider his interest to be prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

In response to suggestions by some members that the charges for parking clocks would remain the same was an election ploy by the majority group, the Leader of the Council stated that the charges had been part of a two year trial on traffic management issues, agreed with Hampshire County Council. The County Council would evaluate the trial and would make recommendations as to future charges.

(c) Eling Tide Mill – The Next Steps

Cllrs Dart, Mrs Francis, F R Harrison, Molyneux, D Russell, Shepherd and Weeks declared personal interests in this item as members of Totton and Eling Town Council. Cllrs Molyneux, D Russell and Weeks also declared interests as the Council's appointed Trustees of Eling Tide Mill.

None of these members considered that their interests were prejudicial and they remained in the meeting, took part in the debate and voted.

Cllr Shand declared a personal interest as Chairman of Eling Tide Mill Trust. He did not consider his interest to be prejudicial and remained in the meeting, took part in the debate and voted.

Cllrs Harris and Rice declared personal and prejudicial interests as representatives from other authorities on the Eling Tide Mill Trust. Cllr Harris declared a further interest as a member of Totton and Eling Town Council. They left the meeting during consideration of the item.

Cllr Shand, as Chairman of the Eling Tide Mill Trust said that the Council appeared largely unaware of the poor financial state of the Mill. The Council was the landowner of the Mill and the adjoining sailing club and had responsibilities for maintaining the fabric of the building. The Trust endeavored to bear the operating costs. The funds agreed by the Cabinet were for essential maintenance work, but more financial support, not just from the Council but external sources, was needed in order to ensure the viability and conservation of the Mill. If resourced properly the milling of wheat at the Tide Mill could become a successful business. He further stated that some Trustees worked hard but efforts to secure sponsorship from external companies had so far met with limited success. The membership and commitment of some of the Trustees were such that the Trust was sometimes unable to deal effectively with the complicated issues surrounding the historic Tide Mill. Members were invited to visit the Mill and offer their support.

The Leader of the Council thanked Cllr Shand for his unstinting commitment and time given to the Mill. The Cabinet was now looking forward to a positive period for the Mill. The Cabinet was aware of the national importance of the Tide Mill, and hoped that continued support by Trustees, Members and Officers would assist with the heritage management and conservation of the Mill. Because of its importance nationally, he considered that national bodies should be engaged to help secure the Mill's future. He was aware that steps in this regard were being taken.

(d) Proposed Finance and Efficiency Portfolio

The Leader of the Council was pleased to announce that Cllr Wise had been appointed to this portfolio.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the recommendations be adopted.

33. QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22.

There were none.

34. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' QUESTION TIME.

Question from: Cllr F R Harrison to Cllr Heron (Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder)

"As it is now almost a year since the last meetings of the New Forest and Solent Transport Strategy Panels, can the Portfolio Holder tell us what alternative methods Hampshire County Council has proposed for consulting District Council members about transportation issues?"

Answer

The Portfolio Holder replied that this type of communication was the remit of the Hampshire Action Teams.

In response to a supplementary question regarding the lack of funds for an agreed project for Totton Town Centre, the Portfolio Holder replied that Hampshire County Council was aware of the need for the project and was trying hard to secure funds in order to take the scheme forward, but a large sum of money was needed.

35. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEE.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Wise be appointed to serve on the New Forest District Council/Test Valley Borough Council Commercial Services Joint Committee in place of Cllr Mrs Holding.

CHAIRMAN