

18 DECEMBER 2006

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

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

Councillors:

- p G Abbott
- e K F Ault
- p C Baker
- p G C Beck
- p Mrs J L Cleary
- e D E Cracknell
- e 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
- p R C H Hale
- p L Harris
- p C J Harrison
- p D Harrison
- p F R Harrison
- p J D Heron
- p P E Hickman
- p Mrs M D Holding
- e J M Hoy
- p Mrs M Humber
- p J A G Hutchins
- p M J Kendal
- e Mrs B M Maynard
- p Mrs M McLean
- e M J Molyneux
- p R J Neath
- p G J Parkes

Councillors:

- p Sqn Ldr 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 N E Scott
- p Lt Col M J Shand
- p S A Shepherd
- p Mrs B Smith
- p Mrs S I Snowden
- p 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
- p Dr M N Whitehead
- p C A Wise
- p P R Woods
- p Mrs P A Wyeth
- Vacancy

Officers Attending:

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

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllrs Dunsdon, Fidler, Kendal and Mrs Robinson declared interests in Minute No 49.

Cllrs Dunsdon, D Harrison, Kendal, Rice and Weeks declared interests in Minute No 51.

Cllrs Mrs Holding, Mrs Robinson and T Russell declared interests in Minute No 52.

47. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2006, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to an amendment to reflect that Cllr Mrs Smith was not present during the discussion on minute no 45.

48. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Festive Occasion

The Chairman reflected that the festive occasion held Saturday evening had been a huge success. The occasion had featured the unique sounds of the band and bugles of the Light Division based in Winchester.

After expenses, all proceeds from the concert would be donated to the Minstead Training Project, Bramshaw Riding for the Disabled, and the Second New Forest North (Stanley's Own) Scout Group, as well as the Light Division's benevolent fund.

The Chairman said that it was very lucky that the Hampshire band, in demand all over the world, had been able to perform for the local charities. The band would be playing again, for the final time in their current composition, at Winchester Cathedral on 27 January 2007.

The Chairman thanked Dianne Bailey, the Corporate and Civic Administrator, and other members of the Communications Team, for all their hard work in bringing about such a successful evening.

Cllr Austin

The Chairman reminded members of Cllr Ken Austin's recent resignation from the Council. Cllr Austin had not been in particularly good health and had moved away from the area to live with his family.

Cllr Austin had been first elected to the Council in 1991, and had represented the Barton Ward until his resignation. Members thanked Cllr Austin for his service to the Council and to the people of Barton over the past 15 years. A by-election to fill Cllr Austin's vacancy on the Council would be held on 25 January 2007.

Cllr Hoy

The Chairman announced that Cllr John Hoy had recently had two bouts of major surgery, the latest to his heart at Guys Hospital in London. The most recent information was that his surgery appeared to have been successful

but that he was still undergoing a number of tests. It was believed that, subject to the test results being satisfactory, Cllr Hoy hoped to be discharged and back home in a few days. Members joined the Chairman in extending best wishes to Cllr Hoy for a speedy recovery.

Christmas

The Chairman wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

49. REPORTS OF CABINET.

Cllr Dunsdon declared a personal interest in Item 6 of the Cabinet's report dated 6 December 2006 as Chairman of the Forest First Partnership Board. He considered that such interest was not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Cllr Fidler declared a personal interest in Item 8 of the Cabinet's report dated 6 December 2006 as a former Trustee of Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre. He considered that such interest was not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Cllr Kendal declared a personal interest in respect of all items of the Cabinet reports as Environment Portfolio Holder for Hampshire County Council. He considered that such interests were not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Cllr Mrs Robinson declared a personal interest in Item 8 of the Cabinet's report dated 6 December 2006 as a Board Member of Spinicker Housing Group. She considered that such interest was not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Cllr Kendal, the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Cabinet, presented the reports of the meetings held on 1 November and 6 December 2006.

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

(a) Sheltered Housing Review

The consultation process undertaken during the review was queried as it had come to some members' attention that local residents were confused as to the proposals and the impact the review would have on individual schemes. Members feared that residents of schemes proposed to be decommissioned would be moved to unfamiliar areas of the District. Some members felt that they were unable to help relieve the concerns of residents as they had not been fully consulted and had not received a copy of a letter circulated to some tenants.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing stated that a letter had been sent to all tenants fully outlining the proposals of the review and the implications for individual schemes. Tenants had been kept abreast of developments throughout the review process and regular meetings had taken place with the Tenant Consultative Group and Housing Officers.

Some members queried whether the proposals had implications for the Right to Buy scheme with concerns surrounding eventual subletting. It was felt that monitoring of subletting should take place.

With regard to the process, members were reminded that a working party, consisting of representatives from both political groups, tenants and housing officers had been constituted to ensure that all interested parties had an opportunity to influence the outcome of the review. Throughout all stages of the review tenants had been thoroughly consulted. Members were advised to contact the Portfolio Holder for Housing direct if future concerns regarding the review arose within their wards. Members were assured that residents would not be forced to move from sheltered housing schemes.

There had also been opportunities for involvement through the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel. The Chairman of the Panel had invited members to attend the recent Review Panel meeting where the sheltered housing review was discussed.

The need for changes to the sheltered housing service had arisen due to the decrease in Supporting People funds. The working group examining this issue were mindful that any changes made should have minimal impact on tenants. Although a thorough consultation process had been undertaken, recently some tenants had become confused regarding the outcome of the review. It was felt that it was the responsibility of individual ward members, with advice from the Housing Portfolio Holder, to resolve these fears. It was recognised that the outcome of the review could also have implications for employees.

(b) Notices of Motion from Council Meeting on 30 October 2006 - The Parking Clock Scheme

Some members expressed a view that the Cabinet decision regarding the price of parking clocks had serious implications on traffic management issues within Hythe. It was felt by some local members that traffic problems within the town had worsened, and that the Cabinet decision had been motivated on monetary grounds. The income generated by the parking clocks came at the detriment to residents of Hythe. Members also queried the position with regard to proposed traffic regulation orders on roads within the District, promised as part of a package with the increased price of the parking clocks.

Cllr M Wade proposed that this issue be referred back to the Cabinet for further examination. The motion was seconded.

In replying to the debate, the Leader of the Council said that the Cabinet's decision was not motivated by money but to resolve traffic management problems within the District. The need for traffic regulation orders would be assessed during 2007/08. Any proposed traffic restrictions were advertised and thus allowed local members and residents to raise any objections or concerns.

Following discussion the motion was put to the vote and was lost.

(c) Gambling Act 2005

Members raised a general concern regarding the dangers of gambling addiction and the serious consequences of gambling to individuals. Some members felt that when referring to vulnerable persons within the Gambling Policy this should also include those of obsessive personalities as these were the people most likely to have serious gambling problems.

It was pointed out that the Council's responsibilities in regard to gambling, and therefore its policy, related only to premises, and not to the proprietors or management of these premises. It was, however, felt that, if possible, the policy be appropriately amended to provide greater protection for those with addictive personalities. It was noted that it would be difficult for proprietors of gambling establishments to judge to whom this would apply.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the recommendations be adopted, subject to the amendment of the Statement of Gambling Policy that the definition of vulnerable persons also include those with addictive personalities.

50. QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22.

There were none.

51. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' QUESTION TIME.

Cllrs Dunsdon, D Harrison, Kendal, Rice and Weeks declared interests as members of Hampshire County Council. They considered that such interest were not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Question 1 from: Cllr F R Harrison to Cllr Heron (Economy & Planning Portfolio Holder)

"Will the portfolio holder please explain why the County Council's replacement of consultative panels by Hampshire Action Teams or HATS has resulted in the formal exclusion of District Council members from directly participating in debates on crucial areas where they have detailed local knowledge?"

Answer

The Portfolio Holder thanked Cllr F R Harrison for his question as it highlighted gaps in knowledge of some members regarding the operation of Hampshire Action Teams (HATs), which could preclude the Council from the full benefit of HATs and greater partnership working.

The County Council's website quoted HATs as "a move to bring the work of the County Councillors to a more local level". This contradicted some members' views that HATs excluded District Councillors.

HATs were subsuming the work of the Highways and Transport Advisory Panels (HTAPs) and Transport Strategy Panels (TSPs), however, their remit was extensive to include:-

- To receive and scrutinise such County Council reports as were local to the area served by the HAT and to make appropriate representations to the Executive Member concerned or to the Cabinet;
- To act as the primary consultees for their area on a range of issues including: - school reorganisation, changes of a county wide nature in regard to term times, transport and admission policy, social care residential home development and reorganisation etc.;
- To conduct community consultation as may be requested by the Cabinet or Executive Member;
- To conduct such consultation with the community as the HAT decides and to report results as appropriate;
- To act as advocates for their community to the Executive, including issues such as persistent community problems of safety, transport, road and traffic; and
- To liaise with the County Council's representatives on LSPs, Crime and Disorder Partnerships, Children's Plan and to present a view to the Cabinet on performance and effectiveness.

The HATs were diverse with a strong focus on partnership working at a local level to enhance democratic accountability and service improvement.

The Portfolio Holder added that the meeting dates were published on Hampshire County Council's website and that they were open to the public. Local knowledge was maintained through the Terms of Reference of the HATs which provided the opportunity to invite and/or co-opt other organisations to work with them.

As a supplementary question Cllr F R Harrison queried how backbench members could get involved in the work of HATs.

In reply, the Portfolio Holder stated that HATs consulted local members on issues affecting local areas and common sense would dictate that local members would be invited to meetings.

Question 2 from: Cllr Tipp to Cllr Rickman (Leisure Portfolio Holder)

“Please will the Portfolio Holder outline the participation levels in the 8 to 16 clubs in our Council leisure centres? Does he have evidence that they are benefiting the young people of the District?”

Answer

The Portfolio Holder explained that the 8-16 clubs were flourishing across the District, in particular Applemore had high participation rates. Detailed participation levels had shown that 57,596 visits had been made in total to 8-16 gyms across the District.

Focus groups undertaken as part of the Youth Panel survey had highlighted requests from teenagers to reduce the price of Health and Leisure Centre facilities. These requests were being considered. Direct feedback on the quality of services at the Health and Leisure Centres had highlighted that parents in particular thought the facilities were excellent and were of benefit to their children. Feedback overall was very encouraging with many citing the good work of the Centres.

Question 3 from: Cllr Shepherd to Cllr Kendal (Leader of the Council & Policy & Resources Portfolio Holder)

“As the Leader of the Council seems to have taken over as lead member with regard to waste management, and in particular, discussions on alternative weekly collection with wheeled bins, does he not feel he has a conflict of interest, being the Cabinet member for the Environment at the County Council?”

Answer

The Leader of the Council replied that the District Council was responsible for waste collection and the County Council was responsible for its disposal. As these were two differing functions there was no conflict of interest. Project Integra also played an essential role in co-ordinating waste issues in the County.

Discussions surrounding twice weekly collections of waste would be dealt with through the Review Panel. Decisions regarding this would only be made following thorough consultation with the public. The Leader said that at future discussions he would restrict his comments surrounding this issue to strategy and timing only.

The Leader concluded that the District Council had been given national recognition for its work in waste collection and he praised the Portfolio Holder for the Environment for his work in this regard.

As a supplementary question Cllr Shepherd queried whether the contrasting views of the Environment Review Panel, which had indicated their concerns regarding wheelie bins and fortnightly waste collections, and the views of the County Council, indicated a conflict of interest.

In reply, the Leader stated that the District Council would continue to work with the County Council for the benefit of the New Forest. However, if parts of the District felt that a fortnightly waste collection was not appropriate and they could maintain recycling performance, he would defer to that view.

Nonetheless, various factors had to be considered when managing waste collection, including residents' views and preferences but also health and safety of refuse workers.

The Leader reiterated the good reputation of the County/Project Integra in its waste management which recently had received royal recognition from His Royal Highness Prince Andrew at the opening of the new plant in Portsmouth.

Question 4 from: Cllr Mrs Ford to Cllr Beck (Crime & Disorder Portfolio Holder)

"Would the Portfolio Holder for Crime & Disorder please explain the repercussions for the New Forest District of the Central Governments funding cuts for neighbourhood policing. In effect cutting the number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) from 30-19?"

Answer

The Portfolio Holder replied that during 2006 the Hampshire Constabulary had been subjected to major re-organisation with the amalgamation of three Business Command Units (BCUs) to form the Western Operational Command Unit (OCU). In the move towards Neighbourhood Policing, Hampshire was due to get 539 PCSOs, however, this figure was likely to be reduced to 333. The Western OCU was allocated 96 of which 30 would go to the New Forest.

As Neighbourhood Policing revolved around partnership working, which included involvement of local elected members, it would in the future be referred to as Safer Neighbourhoods, which was due to be launched in the New Forest on 29 January 2007. Subject to recruiting and training, PCSO's would be seen on the streets from April next.

The New Forest District had been divided into 3 sectors, each sector commanded by an Inspector, the 3 sectors would have a total of 6 neighbourhoods, which would be policed by 1 sergeant, and a designated number of police constables supported by PCSO's.

The Government has made a “U” turn regarding the funding of the PCSO’s scheme resulting in the reduction of the original budget of £9.2m to £2.7m. In turn, this has meant that the expected allocation of 30 officers for the New Forest District has been reduced to 19. The reduction of the expected number of PCSO’s was disappointing. However, assurances had been made by Chief Superintendent Wakefield that there would be no reduction in the standard of policing of the District.

The Portfolio Holder commented that a recent statement made by Cllr Weeks in relation to the Conservatives being “soft on crime” was far from true as the Conservative Administration, working in partnership with the police and other stakeholders were very conscious of the safety and well-being of the community. The credibility of an organisation was not how many were locked up or how many ASBO’s were issued, but how many perpetrators of antisocial behaviour the authorities, making proper use of the powers available to them, divert from becoming hardened criminals and committing crime.

The commencement of 19 PCSO’s in the District was a positive step forward in improving an already efficient policing service of this Council’s area of responsibility. The first of the PCSO’s would come on stream on Friday 21st December and would be appointed to Fordingbridge. In February 2 PCSO’s would start working in New Milton.

Members were also informed that the Portfolio Holder attended the fortnightly meetings of the Anti-Social Behaviour Panel and would put forward any concerns.

52. NOTICES OF MOTION.

Cllrs Mrs Holding declared a personal interest as a member of the Board of the New Forest PCT and a member of the Lymington Fenwick Group. She considered that such interest was not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Cllr Mrs Robinson declared a personal interest as Chairman of Hampshire Partnership NHS Trust. She considered that such interest was not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

Cllr T Russell declared a personal interest as the Director of St George’s Hospital. He considered that such interest was not prejudicial and remained in the meeting to speak and vote.

(a) Cllr Mrs Robinson moved the following motion standing in her name:

“The Council notes with regret the decision of Southampton University Hospitals Trust, supported by Hampshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to close the existing Birth Centres in the New Forest and Romsey and to open a new centre in Ashurst.

The Council regards this decision as all the more regrettable as the representations made by the Portfolio Holder, to the Trust, did not reflect the recommendations of the Health, Housing and Social Inclusion Panel or the resolution of the Cabinet. Instead she chose to promote an option which did not form part of the formal consultation process. The Council's alternative option of retaining and upgrading Hythe Birth Centre was apparently only included as an afterthought. As a result the opportunity for New Forest District Council to have a meaningful impact on the decision was lost.

The Council calls on the Portfolio Holder for Health and Social Inclusion to consider her position and at the very least, to apologise to the Council, the Leader and residents of the New Forest for using her office to promote her own views over and above those reached through the democratic process."

The motion was seconded.

In replying to the motion, Cllr Mrs Holding also expressed her regret at the decision made by the SUHT to close the Birthing Centres in the New Forest and open a new centre in Ashurst. She felt that the decision had been a foregone conclusion. This event mirrored a national trend of maternity unit closures and she felt that the closures within the New Forest were purely the result of budgetary considerations.

The Portfolio Holder felt that she had fully reflected the discussions and decision of the Cabinet in her letter to the Trust.

The Portfolio Holder had, along with Cllrs Mrs Cleary and Mrs Humber and MP Desmond Swayne attended a demonstration in Lymington to lobby for the retention of the Lymington Birthing Centre. Many expectant mothers had stressed their concerns at the distances they would face in travelling to Ashurst. The Portfolio Holder felt that because of the distances involved Lymington was a high priority.

The Portfolio Holder stressed that she put the views and needs of the community above her own and would continue to be advised by those views and views reached through the democratic process. She felt hurt and disappointed that a fellow councillor would think otherwise.

Many members spoke in support of the Portfolio Holder and praised her good work and efforts in helping to promote the health agenda in the New Forest. Some felt that motion was an unfair personal attack on the Portfolio Holder.

On the other hand, some members felt that the letter sent in response to the consultation by the Portfolio Holder had inadequately reflected the views expressed at the Cabinet and the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel and ultimately the Council.

The Leader of the Council proposed the following amendment

“That all paragraphs be deleted and replaced with – this Council thanks the Portfolio Holder for her work on community hospitals as well as birthing centres and expresses its full confidence in her ability”

The amendment was seconded.

In replying to the debate Cllr Mrs Robinson stressed that the aim of her motion was to clarify the political process. She felt that the letter from the Portfolio Holder was that of a personal submission regarding Lymington as opposed to a reply expressing the views of the whole Council. The motion was not intended to be a personal attack but rather a means of holding the Portfolio Holder to account.

Cllr Mrs Robinson went on further to say that the Council had a duty, when replying to consultations to express the views of the residents of the New Forest. This had not been done with the SUHT as the second option of retaining Lymington was put forward as a first priority as opposed to the agreed decision of maintaining the status quo or refurbishing the centre at Hythe. Doing this had downgraded the Hythe option and this was not what the Cabinet and the Review Panel had intended. The response from the Portfolio Holder to the consultation had therefore been ineffective in influencing the final decision.

Following a vote the amendment was carried.

Following a further vote the original motion was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the Council thanks the Portfolio Holder for her work on community hospitals as well as birthing centres and expresses its full confidence in her ability.

(b) Cllr Mrs Smith moved the following motion standing in her name:

“This Council urges the Cabinet to agree an appropriate sum in the budget for 2007/08, to allow the Council to address any urgent issues relating to Climate Change”.

The motion was seconded.

RESOLVED:

That under the provisions of Standing Order 41, the motion be referred to the Cabinet.

53. THE COUNCIL TAX 2007/2008 SETTING THE TAX BASE (REPORT B)

Members considered the calculation of the Council Tax Base in so far as it related to the Council function.

RESOLVED:

That, in so far as the Council is empowered to do so by law:

- (a) the calculation of the Council's tax base for the year 2007/08 be approved; and
- (b) pursuant to this report and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Amendment) Regulations 2003, the amount calculated by this Council as its council tax base for the year 2007/08 be as follows and as detailed in Appendix 1 to Report B to the Council:

PARISH/TOWN	TAX BASE 07/08
Ashurst & Colbury	920.2
Beaulieu	516.4
Boldre	1051.4
Bramshaw	342.0
Bransgore	1865.1
Breamore	184.5
Brockenhurst	1793.1
Burley	791.1
Copythorne	1228.1
Damerham	237.3
Denny Lodge	153.8
East Boldre	398.8
Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley	585.7
Exbury & Lepe	110.1
Fawley	4824.3
Fordingbridge	2363.3
Godshill	214.2
Hale	266.8
Hordle	2437.3
Hyde	506.7
Hythe & Dibden	7699.2
Lymington & Pennington	6898.3
Lyndhurst	1384.0
Marchwood	2035.8
Martin	191.8
Milford on Sea	2715.2
Minstead	365.9
Netley Marsh	821.9
New Milton	10808.4
Ringwood	5408.0
Rockbourne	166.5

PARISH/TOWN	TAX BASE
	07/08
Sandleheath	271.3
Sopley	304.9
Sway	1665.9
Totton & Eling	9805.5
Whitsbury	102.8
Woodgreen	251.8
Whole District	71687.4

CHAIRMAN