

30 JULY 2007

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 30 July 2007.

- p Cllr W H Dow - Chairman
- p Cllr P R Woods - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

- p G C Beck
- p D A Britton
- e Mrs D M Brooks
- p Mrs F Carpenter
- p Mrs J L Cleary
- e D E Cracknell
- p G F Dart
- p S P Davies
- p L T Dunsdon
- p Ms L C Ford
- p H F Forse
- e P C Greenfield
- p C J Harrison
- p D Harrison
- p E J Heron
- e P E Hickman
- p Mrs A Hoare
- p Mrs M D Holding
- p J A G Hutchins
- p Mrs P Jackman
- p M J Kendal
- p C Lagdon
- e Mrs M E Lewis
- p Mrs K J Lord
- p Mrs P J Lovelace
- e B D Lucas
- p Mrs A E McEvoy
- p Mrs M McLean
- p G J Parkes

Councillors:

- p Sqn Ldr B M F Pemberton
- p J Penwarden
- p L R Puttock
- p M P Reid
- p A W Rice
- p B Rickman
- p W S Rippon-Swaine
- p Mrs M J Robinson
- p Mrs A M Rostand
- p D J Russell
- p R F Scrivens
- p Lt Col M J Shand
- p A E J Shotter
- p Mrs B Smith
- p Mrs S I Snowden
- p A J Swain
- p M H Thierry
- p A R Tinsley
- p D B Tipp
- e C R Treleaven
- p F P Vickers
- p M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- p R A Wappet
- p J G Ward
- p A Weeks
- p Dr M N Whitehead
- p C A Wise
- p Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

D Yates, J Mascal, C Malyon, D Atwill, M Devine, Mrs M Dunsmore, Miss G O'Rourke and Mrs R Rutins.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of interest were made in connection with any agenda items.

21. **MINUTES (PAPER A).**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2007, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

22. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Councillor Danny Cracknell

The Chairman was pleased to announce that on 27 June the Mayor of Ringwood Town Council had presented Cllr Cracknell with the Paul Harris Fellowship Award. The award was not issued lightly by the Rotary organisation and was only given to persons who had made a significant contribution towards the community. Members joined the Chairman in congratulating Cllr Cracknell on receiving the award. Members also extended their best wishes to Cllr Cracknell who was currently in hospital.

Support for Oakhaven Trust and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance

The Chairman had formally named Oakhaven Hospice and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance as his chosen charities for the coming year at a ceremony at the New Forest Show.

The Chairman felt these were two wonderful charities and was only too happy to support them. Oakhaven had already touched the lives of many New Forest people and the Air Ambulance was beginning to do the same.

Rhys Jones

The Chairman was happy to have been able to sponsor Rhys Jones, from the Chairman's charity monies, to fly the flag for the Council on the three highest peaks in the Arctic Circle.

The Chairman considered it vital that the Council and other organisations showed support for this type of project. It demonstrated that youngsters had an important role to play in modern society and that the Council recognised emerging leaders from their numbers.

Rhys, from Bartley, had hit the headlines last year when he climbed Mount Everest to become one of an elite few to have scaled the highest peaks in each of the world's seven continents. Next, he had handled 2,000 miles of difficult sailing by competing successfully in the Round Britain and Ireland Race.

He recently embarked on his latest challenge, an Arctic Trilogy, which involved sailing from Iceland to Greenland, skiing 180 miles to the Watkins Mountain Range and then climbing the three highest peaks in the Arctic Circle. He would be planting the flag of the District Council on each of them.

New Forest Show

The Chairman announced the success of the New Forest Show. Despite the pouring rain and mud, the Council's exhibition stand saw more people than ever before. There had been information on what was available at the new-look Hythe Market and on the New Forest Tour bus which took trippers around some of the most scenic areas. One feature at the show that had been particularly popular was the sign up to special energy surveys where people could find information on everything from solar heating to loft insulation.

Visit to Buckingham Palace

The Chairman was pleased to announce that on 19 July 2007 he was privileged to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace with his wife and family where he had met HRH Prince Phillip. The Prince had taken particular interest in the Chairman's chain of office which he had found charming.

Scout Spirit Flame - Centenary of Scouting 2007

The Chairman reported that the Council was contributing in the Scout's centenary week.

He would be greeting the 'Scout Spirit Flame' to the New Forest as it neared the end of its epic journey from Kenya to Brownsea Island. The 'Flame' would be ceremonially handed over by Scouts from Lyndhurst to their colleagues from Calmore, and would then continue on to Foxlease International Guide Centre, Lyndhurst, where it would be handed over to Dr Ian Mason-Smith before heading south to a huge Scout gathering at New Park, Brockenhurst.

The District Council would play its part in helping around 5,000 Scouts at new park to stay as green as possible by setting up a special recycling facility for bottles, paper and cans as well as providing refuse bins for the general rubbish. A mini materials recycling facility (MRF) had also been taken on to the site in support of the initiative.

23. ADJOURNMENT AND RESUMPTION OF MEETING.

The Council adjourned at 19:15 hrs and resumed at 19:40 hrs.

24. REPORTS OF CABINET.

The Leader of the Council, as Chairman of the Cabinet, presented the reports of the Cabinet dated 6 June and 2 July 2007.

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

(a) Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

The Leader reported on the positive feedback received from the Audit Commission who had been highly complimentary following the inspection. They had reported that the Council had performed well. The Council had met the vast majority of its performance indicators and had provided good value for money. The Council had received a good overall score of 3. In order to achieve a level 4 score it was clear that the Council would have to invest additional time and resources and did not consider that this would be value for money.

Some members queried the Council's performance against local and national recycling targets particularly in the light of a recent publication produced by the Council which contained errors in the type of material that could be recycled through the Council's clear sack scheme. The view was expressed that the Council should be clear and concise when giving advice to local residents on recycling and ensure accuracy in its publications.

The Leader responded that a recent information leaflet had been found to contain errors before wide distribution. While the errors were serious and regrettable, steps were being taken to ensure that they did not recur.

(b) Parking Clock Scheme

Cllr M Wade proposed an amendment that the Council maintain the current status quo of charging £8 per parking clock for a period of two years. He felt that the Council received a large income from the current charging scheme, £462 from clocks alone and a total income of £1.5million from parking charges which more than covered the cost of operating the car parks and therefore did not need to charge more. He queried why the Council would want to collect more money from motorists. He further expressed the view that the Council was using the motorist to raise revenue. The increase was unfair and bore no relation to the increase in inflation.

In seconding the motion Cllr D Harrison expressed the view that the increase in parking charges was unreasonable and that to increase charges showed the Council to be treating residents with contempt. The Council would be expecting motorists to bear an increase above the rate of Council Tax increase. This was unfair, particularly when bus services were being reduced in the New Forest. He felt that an 'excellent and improving' Council should strive to meet the needs of all the community, particularly those on low incomes. The increase imposed would be unnecessary.

Some members felt that increasing charges for motorists was in line with the Council's green agenda as it could be seen as an incentive to use alternative, more environmentally friendly modes of travel. Other members felt that the issue was not about promoting environmental issues but rather ensuring local residents were not being charged unnecessarily.

The Leader of the Council felt that the Council's parking charges provided value for money and the proposed rates were minimal compared very favourably with the monies in a neighbouring authority. The two year timeframe for the charges provided a period of consistency for the motorist as well as providing a practical period for printing of clocks. The car parking charges had to be considered in conjunction with other Council policies such as enforcement, on-street parking and residential restrictions and not in isolation.

Cllr M Wade's amendment was put to the vote and was lost.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and was carried.

(c) Financial Strategy 2007/2011

Cllr Mrs Robinson expressed the view that, as suggested in the Cabinet minutes for 2 July 2007, the Financial Strategy should deliver the Council's key objectives and priorities including those arising from the Green Audit. She therefore proposed an amendment to the recommendation that a new paragraph (iii) be inserted: 'that all expenditure plan bids and savings include an environmental impact assessment' and that numbering of the subsequent paragraphs in the recommendation be altered.

The Leader of the Council accepted the amendment. He expressed the view that that this strengthened the discussions already held at the Cabinet meeting and would have no financial impact.

Cllr Mrs Robinson's amendment was put to a vote and was carried.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be received and recommendations adopted, subject to the amendment of Item 6 – Financial Strategy 2007/2011 as set out in paragraph (c) above.

25. REPORT OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE.

Cllr Hutchins, Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee, presented the report of the meeting held on 27 July 2007.

On the motion that the report be received, it was

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the recommendation adopted.

26. QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22.

There were none.

27. NOTICE OF MOTION.

Cllr Pemberton moved the following motion standing in his name:

“That this Council makes representation to the appropriate Government Minister to raise the upper limit of Council Tax on second homes to a level of twice the basic rate”.

Cllr Pemberton considered that there was sufficient evidence to show that the upper limit of 90% of the basic rate was more of an encouragement than a deterrent to second home buyers, when considering the number of dwellings lying empty or unoccupied during winter months. He considered that the seasonal fluctuation had a detrimental effect on local communities.

There had been recent BBC reports of the Government’s concern at the economic decline of seaside resorts along the south coast. More particularly, the housing market had become distorted with developers building for the holiday trade and not for local people.

It was felt that the mechanisms that influenced people’s decisions on whether to have a second home by the sea should be altered. It was considered that the Government should allow local authorities to adjust levels of Council Tax in order to deter the purchase of holiday homes.

He felt that a slight adjustment to the Council tax might be sufficient to temper demand and restore the equilibrium to a housing market that must first serve its neighbourhood and so succour its local economy.

The motion was seconded.

RESOLVED:

That under the provisions of Standing Order 41, the motion be referred to the Corporate Overview Panel.

28. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS’ QUESTION TIME.

Question No. 1 from: Cllr Tipp to Cllr Kendal (Leader of the Council and Policy & Resources Portfolio Holder)

“Does the Leader of the Council support the figure of 80,000 homes to be built in South Hampshire by 2026, as stated in the South East Plan agreed by SEERA, and if so does he believe that this is the maximum figure acceptable?”

Answer:

The Leader responded that the Cabinet acquiesced rather than supported this figure which was contained in Policy 5H 12 of the South East Plan. It had been made clear that this figure of 80,000 homes could be achieved only if the Government provided funds for the necessary infrastructure.

In response to a supplementary question regarding whether the Council would consider asking PUSH to condemn any increase in housing in the South East, the Leader expressed the view that the Council would oppose development without the necessary infrastructure being in place.

Question No. 2 from: Cllr Dunsdon to Cllr Treleaven (Planning & Transportation Portfolio Holder)

“Please advise as to the number and value of excess parking tickets issued and how many people complain because they've purchased a clock, but have forgotten to display it?”

Answer:

In Cllr Treleaven's absence, Cllr Wise responded to the question on behalf of the Portfolio Holder. He said that the assumption had been made that Cllr Dunsdon was referring to Penalty Charge Notices issued under Decriminalised Parking under the 1991 Road Traffic Act rather than Excess Charges which were issued under the 1984 Road Traffic Act. The Council had ceased to issue Excess Charges in December 2005. The assumption had also been made that “complaint” referred to challenges/representations received after a Penalty Charge Notice had been issued.

In the financial Year 2006/7 - 10,498 notices were issued. Total payments received from Penalty Charge Notices were £277,631. In the region of 150 cases had been cancelled over the last 12 months specifically as a result of challenges or representations concerning use of the parking clock scheme.

Statistical information was not kept concerning the grounds under which representations or challenges were made if that representation or challenge was not upheld. There were no figures available concerning the total number of challenges/representations received which specifically involved the use of a clock.

Cllr Dunsdon asked a supplementary question as to whether the Portfolio Holder would consider waiving penalties upon production of proof of purchase of parking clocks. As the Portfolio Holder was absent from the meeting, a response would be given in writing.

Question No. 3 from: Cllr Tipp to Cllr Kendal (Leader of the Council and Policy & Resources Portfolio Holder)

“Now that the Government has decided to abolish it in 2010, will the Leader of the Council begin the process of withdrawing from SEERA, and use the savings to benefit New Forest residents?”

Answer:

The Leader said that the Council currently paid £4518 per year towards SEERA membership. Should the Council wish to withdraw from SEERA a years notice would have to be given. As SEERA conducted business on a financial year basis the Council was potentially tied into membership for 18 months. The Council would not quit SEERA until future arrangements and handover of responsibilities from SEERA to SEEDA had been made clear.

In response to a supplementary question as to whether the Council's financial contributions towards the South East Plan would have been better spent within the Council, the Leader concurred.

29. MEETING DATES FOR THE 2008/09 MUNICIPAL YEAR.

RESOLVED:

That meetings be held on the following Mondays at 6.30 p.m.

19 May 2008 (already agreed)
30 June 2008 (special meeting to approve the Performance Plan, if necessary)
21 July 2008
15 September 2008
27 October 2008
15 December 2008
23 February 2009
20 April 2009
18 May 2009 (annual meeting)

30. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Mrs Lovelace be appointed to serve on the Environment Review Panel in place of Cllr Rippon-Swaine.

CHAIRMAN