

27 SEPTEMBER 2018

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in Committee Room 1, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Thursday, 27 September 2018

- * Cllr M A Steele (Chairman)
- * Cllr A K Penson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- A R Alvey
- * W G Andrews
- * G C Beck
- M J Kendal
- * Mrs A E McEvoy

Councillors:

- * A D O'Sullivan
- * D B Tipp
- * C A Wise
- * J D Heron

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

- M R Harris, Local Economic Development, Property & Innovation Portfolio Holder
- B Rickman, Leader & Corporate Affairs Portfolio Holder
- Mrs C V Ward

Officers Attending:

- R Jackson, A Bethune, M Cole, Ms B Denby, Ms K Grimes, Mrs S Hamilton, Mrs M Sandhu and R Stevens

Apologies

Cllrs Alvey and Kendal

17 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

19 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

20 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Panel received oral updates from:

Cllr B Rickman, who reported on the following topics:

- Smarter working
- Review of Local Economic Partnerships
- Combined Fire Authority consultation response
- Armistice ceremony/Safer New Forest Conference on 12 November

Cllr J Heron reported on the following topics:

- Human Resources and Finance System Software replacements
- Hampshire pilot for retention of business rates

Cllr M Harris report on the following topics:

- A special group to promote local broadband projects
- Solent and M3 Local Economic Partnership
- Property investment
- Income generation
- Film New Forest

On Income Generation, the Panel endorsed his suggested terms of reference for the related Task and Finish Group which were as follows:

‘To identify various business opportunities to generate income’.

21 SMARTER WORKING - THE CASE FOR CHANGE

The Panel considered the strategic approach to smarter working, together with related implementation and budget plans for the period 2018-2021.

Members were advised that ‘smarter working’ was essential for transforming and streamlining the Council to meet current financial pressures and to plan for the longer term. This strategic approach would be characterised by flexibility, with the processes that people were asked to work with continuously challenged to make sure they were fit for purpose. Performance management would focus on results and outcomes.

It was expected that this approach would achieve greater productivity. The cost and environmental impact of work would be reduced as space was shared and used more intensively. This would provide staff with more choice about when, where and how they worked, supported and connected by effective and appropriate technology. It would also meet the public’s increasing expectation that they should be able to interact with the Council through technological means, such as smart phones, whenever they wished. It was emphasised however, that the needs of, in particular, older customers, who wished to deal with the Council face to face, would continue to be met.

The business case in section 4 of the report set out the anticipated financial and non-financial benefits. The timetable for implementation was set out in section 5 of the report. This recognised the constraints that applied to the process, including budgets, implementation of investment in IT and the availability and suitability of accommodation. The timetable would continue to evolve as opportunities arose to effect further change. The budget investment plan enabled effective use of new technologies, based upon the use of hybrid computers, which was central to smarter working. Staff could work more effectively both in the office and away from it using the internet, broadband and wireless communications to work at the most effective times and locations. The aim was also to create an attractive and inspiring working environment across the Council that supported the new work styles, increase the adaptability of space and enhanced performance. In future there would be a mix of work and meeting spaces where work could be carried out.

Budget provision for smarter working had been included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan capital programme for the period up to 2020/21 and totalled £3.5 million over three years. Full implementation of Office 365 was estimated to cost £750,000 over the next 18 months, with an additional revenue cost of £200,000 per annum. A further £500,000 would be needed for changes to accommodation at Appletree Court.

The Chief Executive gave a summary of the proposals for the new work place environments following the move of the Revenue and Benefits team to Appletree Court. He explained that the proposals would require a cultural change from staff.

Members queried the payback term for the project. In reply, it was explained that some of the costs were unavoidable ICT upgrade requirements, whilst others were broader and unquantifiable benefits such as making recruitment easier, creating better services and, through reduction in staff travel, environmental benefits.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to Cabinet that:

- (i) The strategic approach to smarter working be endorsed
- (ii) The utilisation of £1.25m of the Medium Term Financial Plan smarter working budget previously approved by the Council in 2018 to 2020, be supported.

22 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Panel received the recommendations of the Council Task Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group on various aspects of the scheme.

Whilst the Group had undertaken a thorough review, it had resulted in recommendations for very few, minor, changes.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that option (e) (minimum change) as set out in the report be adopted.

23 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS, VOLUNTARY PAYMENTS AND RELATED POLICIES

Members noted that again, a thorough review of various Council Tax exemptions, and discounts had been undertaken by the Task and Finish Group.

The Task and Finish Group had also considered a proposal by Cllr Harrison in respect of voluntary additional Council Tax payments as set out in paragraph 6 of the report and the Group agreed that the proposal be not supported for the reasons stated.

RECOMMENDED:

That options (a) to (e) as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report be approved.

(b) That the local discretionary changes to the National Non-Domestic Rate Relief Policy and the Fair Collection and Debt Recovery Policy be approved as set out in the report.

(c) That the proposal by Cllr D Harrison, in respect of voluntary additional Council Tax payments as referred to in paragraph 6 of the report be not supported, for the reasons stated.

24 COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT

The Panel received an overview of the complaints received by the Corporate Complaints Team in 2017/18, including statistical data from the Local Government Ombudsman.

It was noted that the Standards Committee had previously received annual reports and that the report before the Panel had been requested by the Chairman. There had been very few complaints to the Ombudsman, and EMT, which had considered the report, had been satisfied that corporate complaints were handled appropriately.

In answer to a question, information relating to the number of complaints in neighbouring authorities was provided. Most exceeded those at NFDC.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the report be noted;

(b) That Service Managers be encouraged to ensure that employees respond appropriately to customers who appeared not to have received and expected standard of service from the Council; and

(c) That Service Managers be reminded to review complaints about their services regularly and to implement any learning from them.

25 FILM NEW FOREST - UPDATE

The Panel received an update on the activities of Film New Forest. The Panel were pleased to note the work being undertaken and asked for regular updates.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

26 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel reviewed its Work Programme. The following changes were made:

- A report to explore the possibilities for longer term partnership working with neighbouring authorities, to include options already considered in the past was requested.
- The item on Devolution was deleted as the item on joint working could take its place.
- The Income Generation Task and Finish Group with the associated terms of reference was included. (See minute 20)
- The item on access to alternative funding for parish/town councils was deleted and officers were requested to arrange for NFDC website pages signposting alternative funding sources for voluntary organisations to be made available to members.

27 MEETING DATES FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Panel felt it important to retain a November Panel meeting as there was generally business that was required to be conducted at this time. Accordingly it was agreed that 21 November 2019 be added to the suggested meeting dates for 2019.

RESOLVED:

That the following dates for meetings for 2019/20 (Thursdays at 9.30 a.m.) be approved:

27 June 2019
26 September 2019
21 November 2019
23 January 2020
26 March 2020

28 DATE FOR SPECIAL PANEL MEETING**RESOLVED:**

That a special Panel meeting be arranged for Thursday, 22 November 2018 at 9.30 a.m., to consider the recommendations of the Budget Task and Finish Group and any other issues.

CHAIRMAN

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**CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 27 SEPTEMBER 2018
WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

ITEM	TIMING	LEAD OFFICER
Property Investment Strategy Update	Special Meeting 22 November 2018	Andrew Smith/Alan Bethune
Broadband in the New Forest – update on progress with provision	Special meeting 22 November 2018	Matt Callaghan
Budget T&F Report	Special meeting 22 November 2018	Andy Rogers/Alan Bethune
Asset Maintenance and Replacement and Capital Programme for 2019/20	Special meeting 22 November 2018	Alan Bethune
Accommodation Strategy	24 January 2018	TBC

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TASK AND FINISH GROUPS				
ITEM	OBJECTIVE	METHOD	TIMING	LEAD OFFICER
Budget Task and Finish Group	To review the Council's future budget strategy	Task and Finish Group	To receive updates at the June 2018 meeting, on progress with the Group's recommendations which were submitted at January 2018 Panel meeting	Andy Rogers/ Alan Bethune/ Rebecca Drummond

Minute Item 26

NOT YET TIMETABLED

ITEM	OBJECTIVE	METHOD	TIMING	LEAD OFFICER
Employee Owned Services (John Lewis Model)	Terms of Reference to be agreed	Task and Finish Group	Initiate at June 2019 panel	
“Regions” Continue engagement/ collaboration with HCC/LEPS or any other external public agency, including reference to the Hampshire-wide devolution proposal	To effectively facilitate good relationships with these agencies in order to produce beneficial outcomes in the District	Report documenting progress with LEPs and business portal HCC element via Leader updates	TBC	TBC
Devolution – Wider Hampshire	Monitor progress with regard to devolution	Regular update from Leader	At appropriate times	TBC
Universal Credit update	To be aware of issues arising	Regular update from Finance & Efficiency Portfolio Holder	At appropriate times	TBC
Portfolio Holders’ Updates (Standing Item) Updates from Task and Finish Groups				
Access to alternative funding sources for voluntary organisations and Parish/Town Councils	To explore opportunities, eg crowd funding, following funding reductions	Officer written report	To be confirmed	TBC