

21 JANUARY 2021

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 21 January 2021

- * Cllr Alexis McEvoy (Chairman)
- * Cllr Alan Alvey (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Fran Carpenter
- * Keith Craze
- * Sandra Delemare
- * Mahmoud Kangarani

Councillors:

- * Martyn Levitt
- * Alan O'Sullivan
- Beverley Thorne
- * Derek Tipp

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Sue Bennison
Barry Dunning
Michael Harris
Jeremy Heron
Barry Rickman
Christine Ward

Officers Attending:

Kevin Green and Claire Upton-Brown

Apologies

73 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

74 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

75 FREEPORTS BID

The Panel considered a proposal to submit a Freeport Bid to the Government.

The Panel noted the significant economic and financial benefits to the immediate and wider economy of an area resulting from Freeport status. The bid would be in line with the current Local Plan and would allow a more strategic approach to planning in the area. There were no immediate financial implications for the Council.

The likely impact of any future development on the district and its communities and how any negative impacts could be resolved, mitigated or compensated would need to be considered regardless of Freeport status, though Freeport status may change the process for considering future development and the way this work was funded.

Members noted that Freeports encouraged firms to do business in the area as part of the Government's 'levelling up' agenda, and to increase employment and growth, including in the pockets of deprivation in the District.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be advised that the Panel supports the Freeport bid, which includes a tax site including land at Marchwood Industrial Estate/Marchwood Port/ABP land/Exxon and Fawley.

76 ASSET MAINTENANCE AND REPLACEMENT PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Panel considered the Asset Maintenance and Replacement Programme for 2021/22.

Members expressed a number of concerns concerning the proposed closures of toilet provision at Calshot, and Barton and opposed the closures.

The portfolio holder explained that the report's purpose was to set out the financing of proposals brought forward by other portfolios and services, which were subject in some cases to consultation.

It was noted that a separate task and finish group was being formed to discuss the toilet projects.

Members also felt the coastal recharge was an important project that should continue.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Panel note the contents of the report
- (b) That the schedule of projects as included at appendix 2 and 3 be agreed by the Cabinet for inclusion in the 2021/22 budget, subject to the concerns raised in opposition the proposed toilet closures at Barton and Calshot.

77 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021/22

The Panel considered the Capital Strategy for 2021/22.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that the Capital Strategy 2021/22, including the adoption of the MRP statement, be approved.

78 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel reviewed its work programme and noted performance data in relation to portfolios under this Panel. Members raised a number of queries to which answers were given.

Cllr J Heron

It was noted that the council tax collection rate had reduced due to the pandemic, and for a number of reasons it had not at that time been appropriate to recover arrears.

Commercial property investment had been undertaken prudently, and the initiative not only provided income, but, as only schemes within the Council area were progressed, it was also a means of investing in the local area and supporting enterprise within the District. Good returns on investment had been made.

It was noted that the Hardley Depot works were deferred pending clarification of the waste strategy and operational requirements.

Cllr M Harris

In answer to a question, it was felt New Forest Business Partnership (NFBP) had an excellent role to play and the Chairman worked hard on business growth in the Forest. It was also confirmed that all businesses in the District had now been made automatic members the NFBP.

Broadband connectivity was the top priority and he was working with the Solent LEP.

It was noted that the Council had done exceptionally well in administering grants to local businesses.

Cllr Rickman

Cllr Rickman reiterated comments on the business grants, and praised staff and members for their efforts during the pandemic.

It was noted that Elections were still being held in May, under covid restrictions.

79 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Panel received updates from Portfolio holders on the following points as below:

Cllr Rickman

- Involvement in Freeport Bid
- Waterside Conference
- Covid vaccinations – he commended staff in helping get people vaccinated

Cllr J Heron

- Migration to Teams – successful
- Sharepoint migration underway
- Accolaid replacement

- Commercial Investment - a number of sites under consideration – prudent approach
- Medium Term Financial Plan being finalised

Cllr Harris

- Meeting with MP responsible for Broadband and Solent LEP
- Film New Forest had generated £4m investment in the district
- High Street Assistance Initiatives
- Good property investment income stream – good progress
- Detail on Business Grants

80 STAFF EFFICIENCY/INNOVATION IDEAS SURVEY

The Chairman reported that she had attended the Employee Forum on 11 December and discussed a staff efficiency suggestion scheme.

The Panel fully supported the scheme as proposed.

CHAIRMAN