

23 SEPTEMBER 2021

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

**CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND LOCAL ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Affairs and Local Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 23 September 2021

* Cllr Alexis McEvoy (Chairman)

* Cllr Alan Alvey (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Fran Carpenter
Keith Craze
* Jack Davies
Alison Hoare

Councillors:

* Mahmoud Kangarani
* Martyn Levitt
* Alan O'Sullivan
* Derek Tipp

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Michael Harris
Edward Heron - Leader

Councillors:

Jeremy Heron – Portfolio Holder

Officers Attending:

Grainne O'Rourke, Manjit Sandhu, Claire Upton-Brown, Andy Rogers, Ian Austin, Rebecca Drummond, Karen Grimes, Gary Jarvis, Amanda Wilson, Chris Noble and Davies

16 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in connection with any agenda item.

18 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

**19 CONTROL OF ASBESTOS POLICY AND CONTROL OF CONTRACTORS
POLICY**

The Panel considered policies for the control of asbestos and for the control of contractors, which put the Council on a sound basis in terms of dealing with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012, the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

It was explained that, as the policies bridged both Housing and Corporate buildings, this report would proceed through the Corporate Affairs and Local Economy and the Housing and Homelessness Overview and Scrutiny Panels, and thereafter Cabinet and Council.

RESOLVED:

That the policies be noted.

20 PROCUREMENT (SUPPLY CHAIN UPDATE)

The Panel received an update on the Council's procurement and supply chain arrangements.

A copy of the slides for the presentation are attached to the minutes as Appendix 1.

Members commented on the importance of supporting local businesses as far as possible, within the scope of the procurement framework, though it was accepted this had to be balanced against the best financial option.

The Chairman thanked Mr Jarvis for the presentation and the work of his team.

21 REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2020/21

The Panel received the Annual Complaints Report for 2020/2021, which included an overview of complaints received, including Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman complaints.

It was noted that there had been no complaints to the Housing Ombudsman in 2020/21. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had upheld one complaint for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. This was regarding Planning Development and there was no injustice caused.

Overall, it was considered that the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure continued to provide a robust system for investigating and resolving complaints.

It was important that all services of the Council recorded complaints accurately and notified the Information Governance and Complaints Team so that proper records were maintained and action monitored.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That Service Managers and Executive Heads be encouraged to ensure that employees respond appropriately to customers who appear not to have received an expected standard of service from the Council;
- (c) That Service Managers and Executive Heads be reminded to review complaints about their services regularly, and to implement any learning from them.

22 THE PERFORMANCE OF THE NEW FOREST ECONOMY

The Panel received a report providing a snapshot of the performance of the New Forest Economy using headline data.

The New Forest economy was amongst the largest in Hampshire, however its overall growth did not reflect this for a variety of reasons.

An ageing workforce, an underrepresentation of high value added sectors and a high proportion of unskilled residents are all limiting factors. These influences on the New Forest Economy, as well as the impact of the Covid pandemic, were demonstrated through a variety of different data sources. The report provided a snapshot of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed.

Future updates will cover other indicators including businesses demography (business births, deaths and survival rates). The business demography data for 2020 would be published in November 2021.

The report set out various council initiatives to support the local economy.

Regular updates would be brought to the Panel.

It was acknowledged that Appendix 2 had been miss - labelled and this would be re-issued.

Members commented on the need to improve public transport links and accommodation, particularly for young people.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

23 FILM: NEW FOREST REVIEW

The Panel received an update on the progress of the Film:New Forest Project. The report also sought agreement to set up a Task and Finish Group to consider options for future working arrangements with Creative England.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Panel note the progress of Film:New Forest.

(b) That a Task and Finish Group be established to consider options for future working relationship with Creative England.

24 THE CORPORATE PLAN 2020-2024 'COMMUNITY MATTERS' (REVISED 2021)

The Panel considered the revised Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024, 'Community Matters', to reflect the changes to the Cabinet portfolios and their responsibilities.

The Panel were content with the revisions but had no specific comments to pass on to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

25 NEW ICT SYSTEM FOR OPERATIONAL SERVICES

The Panel considered proposed arrangements for the procurement of a new ICT system for Operational Services.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that funding for improvements to the ICT system(s) supporting Operations be approved.

26 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORTS

The Panel received an oral update from the three Portfolio Holders on developments within their areas.

Cllr E Heron (Leader)

Freeports – the application continuing to move at pace. The Government required an outline business case. Recent guidance had been released on custom sites. Dialogue was underway with HM Treasury on the tax site in the waterside area. In view of the number of habitat nature designations in the area, the Council was keen to be the greenest freeport. He was optimistic that the designation as a Freeport would bring educational, economic and social benefits to the waterside and the wider New Forest. A number of local organisations were in discussion with international businesses, potentially involving multi million pound investments in the District.

Cllr M Harris (Business, Tourism and High Streets)

A High Streets event was to take place on 20 October, focussing on encouraging footfall. Also encouraging businesses to go online. Reference to the 'Kindness Economy' – encouraging better use of vacant space.

Sponsorship of locally produced topiary exhibit at Chelsea Flower Show, in association with Go New Forest.
Forging links between the New Forest Hotel Group and Brockenhurst college.

New Forest Business Partnership awards - nominations sought for micro businesses (less than 5 employees), by 1 October.

Cllr J Heron (Finance, Investment and Corporate Services)

Cllr Heron referred to the new Corporate Plan and the value of the associated dashboards, which provided a good snapshot.

NFDC had performed well in a recent external 'ICT Health Check' – good security standards. Interviews for the new ICT Manager appointment went very well, with high calibre applicants.

Reference was made to a new investment in Ringwood, and overall, the Council had invested £17m in property, which generated approximately £1m income per year.

Work was underway to mitigate costs of the National Insurance increase.

27 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel received and noted its work programme.

28 DATES OF MEETINGS 2022/23

RESOLVED:

That the following dates of meetings in 2022/23 be agreed:

(Thursdays at 9.30 am):

23 June 2022
22 September 2022
17 November 2022
19 January 2023
23 March 2023

CHAIRMAN