

18 NOVEMBER 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, 18 November 2021

* Cllr Alexis McEvoy (Chairman)

* Cllr Alan Alvey (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Fran Carpenter
* Keith Craze
Jack Davies
* Alison Hoare
* Mahmoud Kangarani
Martyn Levitt

Councillors:

* Alan O'Sullivan
* Derek Tipp
* Michael Harris
* Edward Heron
* Jeremy Heron

*Present

Officers Attending:

Alan Bethune, Sally Igra, Andy Rogers, Ryan Stevens and Claire Upton-Brown

Apologies

29 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 be confirmed and signed.

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on any agenda item.

31 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

32 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' REPORTS

Cllr E Heron:

Solent Freeport - progressing well. An exciting opportunity for the Waterside and the wider district. Once the Freeport was established, there would be arrangements for retained business rates to be pooled and used for infrastructure spending, including on environmental projects, with an aspiration to be the greenest freeport in the country. This meant achieving economic development in a sensitive area, via sustainability, innovation, with mitigation and enhancement of the environment.

The business case was expected to be submitted in March 2022. It was estimated that approximately 50,000 jobs would be created and a £2bn net benefit brought to the area. The aim was to better distribute the benefits of economic growth, in the context of low incomes and inclusive growth, with the Freeport providing opportunities for local people. These opportunities would include training and upskill opportunities to enable people to access the new jobs created by the Freeport. The outline business case was about to be submitted and it was understood that the Chancellor had referred to the Solent Freeport as already having been designated.

It was agreed that a report be brought to a future Panel meeting on the 'pros and cons' of the Freeports initiative, once the business case had been submitted.

Smarter Working proposals were being submitted by officers for future hybrid working arrangements.

The Corporate Plan review had been completed, which officers and Portfolio holders would be working towards, and the Panel would see KPI data at appropriate times.

Cllr Harris

A number of initiatives were outlined:

- **High Streets Conference** – a recording of the Conference was now available to view online. A number of initiatives had emerged as a result.
- **GoNew Forest** – The Council continued to liaise with GNF.
- **Economic Development Team** was now complete, with a full compliment of staff. Sally Igra was now leading the team.
- **Business support grants** were being distributed.
- **Employment Hub** - A new initiative involving New Forest, Eastleigh and Test Valley and Winchester, collaborating to form an Employment Hub, with various initiatives to help 18-24 year olds. Two hubs had been set out in the New Forest, in Brockenhurst (at the college) and in Totton.
- **Income Generation** - Further consideration would be given to income generation on the Council's website.

Cllr J Heron

- **New ICT Manager** - It was reported that the new ICT manager, Paul Downton, had been in post for 2 months and was reviewing future improvements.
- **Medium Term Financial Plan** Work was in progress on reviewing the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- **Financial position** The Council's financial position remained strong, though there were some challenges for the future.
- **Chancellor's statement** – detail was still awaited on the implications for the Council of the Chancellor's statement.

33 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2022/23

The Panel considered the Council Tax reduction scheme for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that options A, B, C and as detailed in Section 6 be adopted from 1 April 2022.
- (ii) That a Task and Finish Group review a Banded scheme during 2022, along with the vulnerable category with any proposals for change to take effect from 1 April 2023.

34 COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM AND CARE LEAVER DISREGARD

The Panel considered the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium and Care Leaver Disregards.

It was noted that most Councils in Hampshire charged the maximum premiums available, and the aim was not to generate income, but to bring empty properties back into use.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet:

- (i) That the empty homes premium is increased from 150% to 200% for properties that have been vacant and unfurnished for more than five years, and
- (ii) That the empty homes premium is increased from 150% to 300% for properties that have been vacant and unfurnished for more than ten years, and
- (iii) That where a property is subject to an empty homes premium and a new owner becomes liable for council tax, they will be exempt from the premium for a six month period, and
- (iv) That the adoption of a care leaver disregard for care leavers aged under 25 be agreed.

35 UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE

The Panel received presentation on Universal Credit. A copy of the slides is attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes.

Universal Credit went live in 2017 in job centres across the district, and replaced working and child tax credits, income support, housing benefit, employment and support allowance and jobseeker allowance claims.

The decline in Housing Benefit claims was noted.

Figures on the migration to Universal Credit were explained. For the New Forest, the migration for working-age claimants was anticipated to take place in 2023/24 and the Council would work with partners to support claimants.

36 FINANCIAL STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Panel considered the report of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group.

Cllr Craze had chaired the Group and explained that its members had met with each Cabinet member, who were asked a number of questions. The Group were impressed with their depth of understanding and knowledge.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted and that the follow up actions for carrying through to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels, be endorsed.

37 THE NEW FOREST LABOUR MARKET PROFILE

The Panel considered the report of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group.

Cllr Craze had chaired the Group and explained that its members had met with each Cabinet member, who were asked a number of questions. The Group were impressed with their depth of understanding and knowledge.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted and that the follow up actions for carrying through to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels, be endorsed.

38 SUMMARY OF WELCOME BACK FUND EXPENDITURE

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Cllr Craze had chaired the Group and explained that its members had met with each Cabinet member, who were asked a number of questions. The Group were impressed with their depth of understanding and knowledge.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted and that the follow up actions for carrying through to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels, be endorsed.

39 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel received and noted its work programme.

40 ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

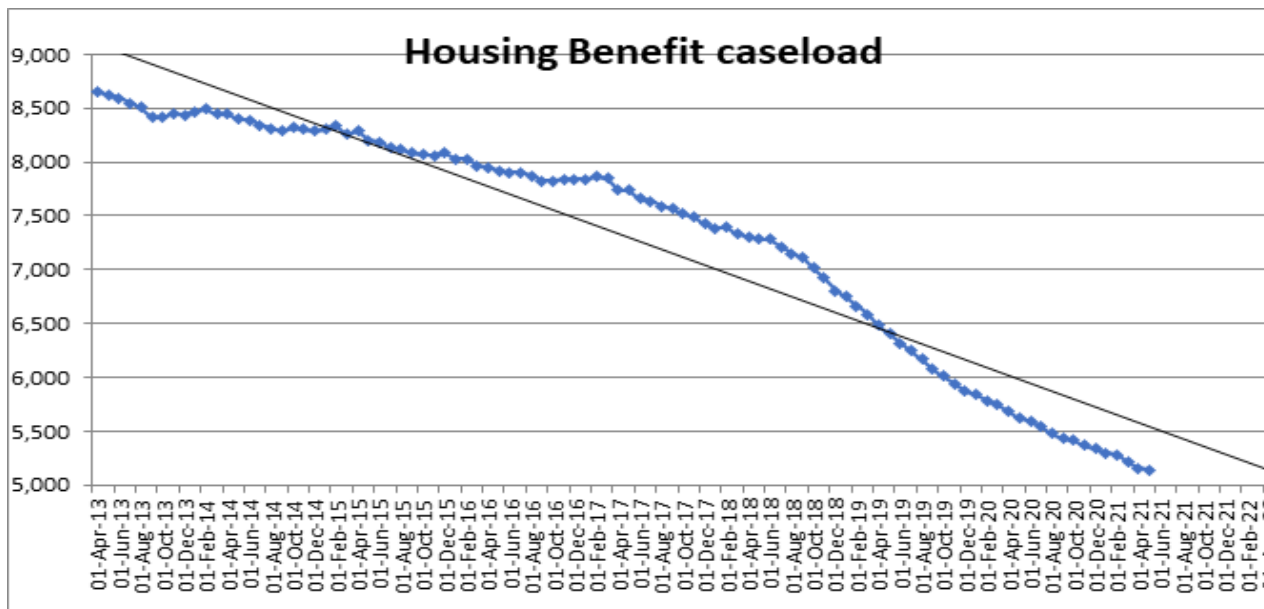
CHAIRMAN

Universal Credit

APPENDIX 1

Housing Benefit caseload

- Universal Credit full service 2017
- Replaces HB/TC/IS/JSA/ESA claims
- Legacy HB – temporary/supported/pensioner



HB Claims

Working Age = 1738

Pensioner age = 2703

Migration

- 6,750 UC claims in NF – circa 50% working
- Managed migration of HB claims pilot in Harrogate in 2019 – 12 claims
- Paused due to COVID – no current plans to resume..?
- Natural migration – COVID, triggers and UC now more generous as taper reduced 63% to 55%
- Expected start in 2023/24 - complete by 2024/25...?
- Pensioners – UC in PC 2025....2030?
- Support claims affected – likely to be vulnerable
- No plans for temp/supported accommodation

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