

1 FEBRUARY 2023

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 1 February 2023

* Cllr Jill Cleary (Chairman)

* Cllr Diane Andrews (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Geoffrey Blunden
Steve Davies
* Michael Harris

Councillors:

* Edward Heron
* Jeremy Heron
* David Russell

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Ann Bellows
Steve Clarke
Anne Corbridge
Keith Craze
Philip Dowd
Allan Glass

Councillors:

Christine Hopkins
Joe Reilly
Steve Rippon-Swaine
Derek Tipp
Malcolm Wade
Christine Ward

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Alan Bethune, Roxanne King, Chris Noble, Grainne O'Rourke, Iain Park, Sheryl Parry, Ryan Stevens, Claire Upton-Brown, Karen Wardle and Matt Wisdom

Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr S Davies.

62 LEADERS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader announced that she was delighted to be receiving the initial findings of an independent survey with New Forest residents. The survey showed strong performance for the authority against national benchmarks, along with some areas for improvement. The Council would be evidence based, using data and insight to ensure that resources were spent wisely. The Cabinet would look at the feedback from residents in setting priorities moving forwards.

The Council would continue to work with partners in the cost of living steering group to understand how to target our work together. The Leader reported that funding had been awarded to over 15 New Forest organisations to contribute to costs of setting up and running warm spaces in the winter.

Support was being provided to local businesses and last month a new free scheme had been launched offering start-up support. Over 17 New Forest residents and businesses had benefitted from advice and guidance. The new Platinum Jubilee

Business Park would be opening in the spring and this was already over one third let.

The 2023 New Forest Shop Doctor programme had recently been launched, which aimed to improve the customer experience in town centres throughout the New Forest through a series of 'Mystery Shopper' visits. This was available to independent retail and hospitality businesses in Hythe, Lyndhurst, New Milton and Barton, as well as Milford on Sea and Brockenhurst. To date over 70 businesses had been recruited to participate.

63 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2022, be confirmed and signed.

64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests made by Cabinet Members.

65 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no issues raised during the public participation period.

66 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT (BASED ON PERFORMANCE APRIL TO DECEMBER 2022 INCLUSIVE)

RESOLVED:

That the latest budget forecasts of the General Fund (section 4), Capital (section 5), and HRA (section 6) be noted.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes.

PORTFOLIO:

Finance, Investment & Corporate Services / All

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder presented the financial monitoring report, highlighting that it provided an update to the end of the third quarter of the financial year. He felt that on the whole the Council was in a good, stable position financially. However, he drew attention to the Housing Revenue Account, recognising the high level of expenditure in this area to provide more housing which was of benefit to residents.

The Section 151 officer outlined that the report covered the financial position of the General Fund budget, Capital Programme and HRA for the period April to December 2022 inclusive. Section 4 of the report and Appendix 1 and 2 set out the breakdown in General Fund variations. This had resulted in a reduction in outturn spend compared to the previous monitoring report.

The General Fund showed a forecast spend of £21.373 million for the year, an overall increase of £699,000 from the original budget estimate. The Capital Programme was being reduced marginally to £41.599 million for the year. The Council was on track to deliver a significant programme this financial year.

The HRA budget was set out in section 6 of the report. It showed signs of financial pressure, with a reduction in income and an increase in cost pressures. Any ongoing variations would be considered in the context of the 2023/24 budget which would come forward to the Cabinet on 15 February.

It was recognised that it was forecast to generate an additional £84,000 as a result of increases in recycling income and a member questioned whether this would continue. In response the Portfolio Holder reported that HCC would be providing a new MRF for the sorting of recycling materials, however, the final details had not been provided by the County regarding the proposed financial arrangements with the District Council on the sale of recycling materials.

67 CEMETERIES PROVISION**RESOLVED:**

That the following recommendations be approved:

1. In order to meet predicted future interment needs, officers carry out further work to progress the expansion of interment provision at Calshot cemetery, and that the Cabinet agree a new budget of £60,000 to facilitate this work;
2. In order to meet predicted future interment needs, officers continue discussions with the landowners of the adjacent and adjoining land identified at Milford Cemetery, with a subsequent project budget to be confirmed at a later date;
3. To progress a review of eight closed churchyards, and two additional nearing closure, to ensure the associated transferred liabilities and risks are in full compliance with legislation; and
4. To progress options for cremated remains columbaria and identify the most appropriate locations in our cemeteries, paying particular attention to Calshot and Milford Road.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes.

PORTFOLIO:

People and Places

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report expressing that it was important with a growing population to review the capacity of cemeteries in order to meet the demand in the future.

The Grounds and Streetscene Manager reported that a local authority is defined as a burial authority under the Local Government Act 1972. The Act states burial authorities may provide and maintain cemeteries in or outside of their area. The Council had historically preferred to provide interment provision on suitable land inside the district boundary. It was important to consider the future predicted interment needs and plan for cemetery provision. This had been considered until at least 2040.

The report also considered a review of closed churchyards and the liabilities and risks to ensure that Council was in full compliance with legislation.

Members expressed their support to the recommendations in the report, highlighting the importance of planning future cemetery provision. The importance of the work the service provided was also acknowledged along with the sensitively delivered provision of welfare funerals.

68 RESIDENT INSIGHT**RESOLVED:**

That the following be supported:

1. The next steps as outlined within the report;
2. A two-yearly resident survey going forward; and
3. Sharing findings and anonymised data with our partners

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes.

PORTFOLIO:

Leader's

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Leader presented the report and expressed her full support to using the results of the survey to shape future Council priorities as well as a resident survey being carried out on a two yearly basis.

The Service Manager – Elections and Business Improvement highlighted that the key findings of the recent survey were presented in the report. Members had received a briefing on the results of the survey and they had been considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The sample of results closely matched the population profile which meant that there was confidence in the reliability of the results. The findings would be used to consider improvements to how the Council delivered its services in the future.

Members acknowledged the value in conducting a survey to determine the views of residents, and following a review to consider and identify areas for improvement. It was suggested that as it was recommended to carry out a survey on a two-yearly basis, that the District Council could look to use a comparable local authority to that of the New Forest, rather than the national benchmarks in the future. It was recognised that the District Council could explore whether benchmarking against local authorities with similar characteristics would be possible.

Members felt that the results were very positive and a credit to the work of officers in delivering services to residents and businesses in challenging times, but it was also acknowledged that more could be done to improve.

The Cabinet requested that their thanks be passed onto the officers who had been involved in the resident insight survey.

69 CLIMATE CHANGE & NATURE EMERGENCY ANNUAL UPDATE 2023**RESOLVED:**

1. That the activities undertaken and progress made in 2022 in response to the declared Climate Change and Nature Emergency be acknowledged;

2. That the NFDC's role as a Local Authority be acknowledged which is to support National Government policy around change and the environment; but as leaders of place, we can work with partners and the public to encourage all to understand and play their part;
3. That the Climate Change and Nature Emergency Action Plan 2023 (Appendix 5) be approved;
4. That the strategic direction of NFDC's climate action be supported, as set out in this report, on the understanding that the three prioritised programmes of activity (Carbon Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Nature Recovery) are intended to ensure best results and maximum value for money; and
5. That it be agreed to set a 5-Year Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028 in summer 2023, in accordance with the revised Corporate Plan 2023-2027, with progress to be reported annually aligning activity to the financial year.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

Environmental and Coastal / All

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Climate Change Manager provided a brief overview of the report, which included an update on the progress towards achieving the aims of the Climate and Nature Emergency Declaration. Background information had been provided with data of climate change projections in the New Forest as well as baseline data. This had been compared to neighbouring authorities and national statistics. Section 5 of the report provided an update on the Strategic Action plan for 2022 and section 6 set out the Strategic Direction for 2023.

Members of Cabinet and the Council expressed their support to the report confirming the importance of reducing impact on the environment and to adopt a more sustainable approach. It was important for the District Council to take a lead in its approach and it was hoped that others would follow. The nature element of the emergency was recognised and it was hoped that everyone could get involved and

make small steps to improve the environment, with for example, the installation of swift boxes to properties.

It was recognised that the New Forest had the highest domestic and industrial emissions and the second highest transport and commercial emissions when compared to other District Council areas in Hampshire. A Member expressed concern that with the proposed new development on the Waterside and with the Freeport, that transport and commercial emissions would increase having a further negative impact on the District.

The Council's appointed representative on the Freeport Board responded to the points raised. He reported that the Freeport was proposed to be the greenest Freeport and would be aiming for net zero, both in terms of carbon and nature. The Freeport would help to grow the economy of the New Forest in a sustainable way. The largest oil refinery in the UK was also located in the District which was a significant factor in the high level of industrial emissions. However, it was suggested that in the future hydrogen might be produced by Exxon rather than oil.

A member outlined that whilst the report provided clear data, it should be noted that not all residents were worried about climate change, and indeed some may not see the immediate impact as negative for our locality.

Members suggested that a briefing be provided to all councillors after the election on the climate change and nature emergency. This would help members to disseminate information to local residents. It was also suggested by a member that consideration be given regarding the messaging to residents on this matter.

70 COMMUNITY GRANTS

RESOLVED:

1. That the Community Grant awards, totalling £129,600 in revenue grants and £92,000 in capital grants, as set out in Appendix 1, and in more detail in Appendix 2, be approved for inclusion in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2023/24;
2. That the proposed changes as set out in section 4.2 of the report be approved; and
3. That the Community Transport grants as set out in section 5.5 of the report be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

People and Places

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder supported the community grant proposals and expressed his thanks to those members who had been involved in the Task and Finish Group.

The Service Manager – Revenue and Benefits reported that the community grant applications had been received from a wide range of groups throughout the district. 27 applications had been received requesting in excess of the budget available for both revenue and capital grants. The recommendation sought approval of 13 revenue grant applications, totalling £129,000 and £92,000 towards 6 capital grants.

The Task and Finish Group also recommended that changes be made to the process for the following year as outlined in the report. Community Transport Grants were proposed to be supported in 2023/24 to provide funding towards three transport projects with funding in excess of £50,000.

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group expressed his thanks to the officers involved in community grant process for their help and support.

71 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES - SCHEME TO APPLY FROM 1 APRIL 2023**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet recommends to Full Council that the current scheme of members' allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2023.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

N/A.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

All Members of the Cabinet had been granted a dispensation to speak and vote on this item.

DISCUSSION:

The Service Manager for Democratic and Support Services introduced this technical paper. The Council is required annually to adopt a scheme of members' allowances as part of the budget setting process. The Council could only make changes to the members' allowance scheme following recommendations from an Independent Remuneration Panel. In July 2022 a review had been carried out by an Independent Remuneration Panel and the current scheme had been adopted.

Following the new Council in May, a further review of members' allowances would be carried out, likely to be in 2024.

A Member spoke of the Electoral Review and the financial savings and questioned whether following a review of members' workload, whether allowances would be increased and therefore negate the savings.

In response the Service Manager reported that the Medium Term Financial Plan outlined that there would be an initial annual saving of £80,000 out of the Electoral Review. This would need to be monitored as there were likely to be additional savings on, for example travel expenses. However, the Independent Remuneration Panel would review members workload under the new Council and form new recommendations on members' allowances.

Members spoke about the importance of members' allowances in order to attract and encourage diversity of members. It was not possible for some residents to become a councillor if their financial position was adversely affected.

72 ASSET MAINTENANCE & REPLACEMENT PROGRAMME AND GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet approve and recommend to Full Council that:

1. The schedule of projects, as included at Appendix 1 and 2 of the Cabinet report be approved within the 2023/24 budget, noting this commits the Council to expenditure beyond 23/24 whereby a project commences in 2023/24 and extends into future years; and
2. The Vehicle & Plant replacement programme be approved for a 2 year period, covering purchases due in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

Finance, Investment and Corporate Services

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder reported the significant expenditure proposed to be spent in order to maintain and replace assets. The Council was in a fortunate position that this multi million pound programme could be funded and he spoke of the need to maintain and replace equipment. He was pleased to be able to present the report and felt that the finances of the Council were well run with prudent financial management.

The Section 151 officer confirmed that the report looked at the proposed future expenditure in relation to the asset maintenance and replacement programme and the general fund capital projects for 2023/24. It provided an indicative budget to 2024/25.

The Asset maintenance and replacement budget was financed through the general fund revenue budget. The proposed budget for next year aligned to the proposed projects listed in the report. The Capital programme was proposed to be funded in several ways; through external grant funding, CIL, developer contributions and NFDC resources.

Significant expenditure had been allocated towards the cyclical replacement of older vehicles with greener, cleaner and more fuel efficient vehicles. The programme also included, a provisional sum to the Hardley Depot Project, in order to provide a suitable facility to deliver one of the key front line services.

A member of Cabinet spoke about the Council funding the Hardley depot at a cost of £7 million, as a huge level of investment for the long term which would provide a new modern efficient facility. He also highlighted the importance and benefits of expenditure on the public conveniences modernisation programme.

In response to a question regarding the impact of inflation on the programme, the Portfolio Holder reported that adjustments had been made in the report to account for inflation and that a prudent approach had been taken, however it was not possible to guarantee the figures within the report would not increase.

73 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/24**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet recommend to Full Council that the Capital Strategy 2023/24 be approved, including the adoption of the following MRP statement:

“ For capital expenditure that has been incurred, and which has given rise to a CFR, the MRP policy for expenditure other than that incurred on investment property and dwellings, shall be to charge revenue an amount equal to the depreciation of any asset financed by loan. The MRP policy specific to investment properties and dwellings financed by loan, shall be to charge

revenue an amount equivalent to the sum of borrowing utilised, over a repayment period of 50 years.”

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

Finance, Investment and Corporate Services

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder reported that this was a high level document which outlined a total capital expenditure of £139 million. The report included how expenditure it would be financed, using internal financing wherever possible but also consider the use of external financing.

The Section 151 officer confirmed that the report brings together the proposed capital expenditure for 2023/24. A significant programme of expenditure had been proposed over the next 3 years. The proposed funding was highlighted in the report, utilising internal funding as much as possible, and external resources, as required.

The report also included the Minimum Revenue Provision statement, which was consistent with the policy over the last few years.

74 DELEGATION OF POWERS TO OFFICERS

RECOMMENDED:

That the Council's Scheme of Delegation of Powers to Officers that are the responsibility of the Cabinet, be updated to:-

- (a) replace all references to "Executive Head" with "Strategic Director"; and
- (b) include a new delegation to "Assistant Director", in respect of all powers currently delegated to Strategic Directors, Service Managers and all other Council officers.

CHAIRMAN