

23 JUNE 2022

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 June 2022

- * Cllr Alexis McEvoy (Chairman)
- * Cllr Derek Tipp (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Alan Alvey
Keith Craze
Jack Davies
Richard Frampton

Councillors:

Alison Hoare
* Mahmoud Kangarani
Martyn Levitt
* Alan O'Sullivan

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Michael Harris
Edward Heron

Councillors:

Jeremy Heron
Diane Andrews

Officers Attending:

Alan Bethune, Paul Downton, Rebecca Drummond, Sara Hamilton, Sally Igra, Andy Rogers, Ryan Stevens, Claire Upton-Brown and Kate Ryan

Apologies

Cllrs Craze, J Davies, Frampton, Hoare and Levitt.

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022 be confirmed and signed.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

7 SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES, HOUSEHOLDS AND THE COMMUNITY

The Panel received and noted a summary of the support given to businesses via the Government's various Business Support Schemes and the range of support given to households and local communities in 2021/22. The report also summarised the support being administered from 1 April 2022.

Over £32m from 17 schemes of grants, payments and funding was administered by the Council in 2021/22, to support local businesses, households and communities.

It was acknowledged that in addition to the support set out in the report, the Council gave over £130K in community grant funding to local voluntary organisations.

Members wished to place on record their thanks for the team's excellent performance in administering so many funding streams so efficiently and effectively.

8 PERFORMANCE OF THE NEW FOREST ECONOMY

The Panel received and noted a report setting out performance data on the local economy.

The report included data on benefit claimants, and initiatives to support the local economy, such as the Central and West Hampshire Youth Employment Hub. It also gave details of an initiative involving local schools to raise awareness on the variety of career options in the area.

Broadly the New Forest economy appeared to be recovering positively from the impacts of the pandemic. The claimant count for April 2022 for ages 16 – 64 continued to move in a positive direction with the Claimant Count standing at 2,100 individuals (2.1%).

Youth unemployment was also showing a positive trend; in April 2022, 335 young people aged 16-24 were recorded on the Claimant Count, down from a peak in July 2020 of 865.

9 DIGITAL STRATEGY - CUSTOMER FIRST, DIGITAL BY DESIGN

The Panel considered the proposed Digital Strategy for 2022-25. The accompanying slides are attached to these minutes as Appendix 1.

It was explained that 'Customer first, digital by design' was the ethos of the proposed NFDC Digital Strategy, and included the following core principles:

1. All services would adopt full end to end digital business models
2. All services would actively use data to inform decision making and report performance in real-time.
3. The Council would develop its workforce to realise the business benefits of digital service delivery.
4. Services would continue to review their capabilities and capacity, reshaping services to leverage the business benefits of digital practice.

It was noted that consultation had been undertaken with peers in other authorities as well as among NFDC service managers and EMT members, as well as with the Portfolio Holder responsible for ICT.

It was explained that the work on Members' devices was planned for later in 2022, as this would give sufficient time to prepare for the new cohort of members post May 2023.

The point was made that not only was online delivery more cost effective, but it was a positive change for residents as they could access online services at a time convenient to them.

Members were keen to keep abreast of updates on delivery, to ensure the 'customer first' ethos was being prioritised in project delivery, in line with the strategy building blocks. Officers confirmed that regular update reporting on project identification and delivery would come through the overview and scrutiny panel.

Members sought reassurance that allowances were being made for those residents who were not able, or did not want, to use online services. In response, assurances were given that traditional forms of communication such as telephone and face to face communications would remain available.

Members pointed out that the Customer Service Task and Finish Group had not met for some time (since February) and officers were questioned on where member involvement had featured in the design and development of this strategy. Officers were very mindful of the need to prioritise the needs of the residents in any developing strategy and would ensure those needs were taken into consideration.

Regular updates would be given to the Panel as the strategy evolved, and the ICT Service Manager offered to discuss any points of detail with individual members outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that the proposed Digital Strategy be adopted.

10 COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Panel received a presentation providing a progress update / Annual Report on the Council's Commercial and Residential Property investments. A copy of the presentation slides is included in the agenda pack.

Members highlighted the void periods stated in the report and queried the potential for lost income. It was explained that the financial return to the Council was related to the interest paid by the company on its borrowing from the Council, based on the date of acquisition, not the date of let, or the void periods.

In respect of Hardley depot, a member was pleased to note that the development would release an asset for alternative use.

Members felt this was a very encouraging report with returns to the Council in line with the strategies, whilst helping the local economy. They thanked officers for their efforts in achieving this result.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the performance to date in the delivery of the commercial and residential strategies and the continuation of both projects be noted.

- (b) That an update of the Asset Investment Strategy 2017 be prepared for Q3 2022 to ensure aims and objectives and the funding pools remain appropriate.

11 RESIDENTS SURVEY - PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation on the proposed arrangements for a future residents' survey. The slides are attached to these minutes as Appendix 2.

It was explained that in order to gather resident and community insight, a representative survey of the District's residents was proposed to be undertaken in line with national best practice from the LGA, and cohort councils.

The survey was to be undertaken between 1 September and 31 October 2022 and would enable the Council to understand and respond to changing resident needs, their perceptions, and make improvements to services and baseline current performance. The results would also inform the next corporate plan.

It was noted that the survey was constructed to allow demographic analysis on each question, which may reveal different attitudes ie, by age group etc.

It was noted that Havant Borough Council (HBC) had also undertaken this type of survey and the Chairman suggested that HBC be asked for any learning points gained from the survey. Officers would report back.

Any member would be welcome to talk to the Cabinet members about areas they would like to see explored in the survey.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the budget for the proposed survey was £25K, subject to Cabinet agreement.

It was anticipated that follow up work and further surveys or engagement activity may follow this survey and the Council would then consider whether it wished to run the survey on a regular basis going forward.

An update on the survey results would be brought to the Panel in January 2023.

12 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN

The Panel received the Annual Performance and Provisional Budget Outturn for 2021 / 2022.

Officers confirmed that more detail behind the out turn variations were included within the provisional out turn report presented to the Cabinet in May. A firmer link between the two reports would be made in future out turn reporting.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Annual Performance Report for 2021/22 be noted;
- b) That the provisional outturn of the General Fund revenue and capital budgets for 2021/22 be noted;

c) That the provisional outturn of the Housing Revenue Account for 2021/22 be noted.

13 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORTS AND PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD

The Panel received updates from the portfolio holders on issues relating to their areas and on their performance dashboards.

Cllr E Heron

The Leader referred to the various pressures on the global economy, and stressed the importance of working with local and regional partners, the education sector and employers, collaborating to improve the prosperity of the New Forest area, and ultimately those who live and work in the area. This could be achieved through skills, employment and economic opportunity. The importance of upskilling the local workforce was also emphasised, as well as making the Council an employer of choice.

He also referred to an upcoming report to the Cabinet on support available to the public, and emphasised the importance of raising awareness of what was available.

In answer to a question, the Leader was confident the Council was in a good position to deal with unexpected events, through the experience of covid and working in partnership with others.

He was pleased with the progress being made with ICT and the way it assisted various services.

He was in summary generally pleased with the overall performance in the dashboard, though it was acknowledged that some areas needed to be revisited in light of risks associated with rising inflation and the related impact on staff.

A question was asked concerning the effects of rising interest rates and any related risks having regard to property investment. In reply, it was explained there would be an impact, and the Council's approach would continue to be cautious, whilst retaining a diverse portfolio.

Cllr J Heron

Reference was made to new external pressures following covid, including rapidly rising inflation and the global economy, all of which affected the Council's finances and had not been foreseen at the time the budget was set.

He paid tribute to the officers operating the Council Tax Collection, which were improving, and also their hard work on distributing grants and funding as mentioned earlier on the agenda, reiterating that NFDC was in the top quartile nationally for efficient delivery.

Cllr Harris

Cllr Harris praised the work of the Youth Hub, a project for 16-24 year olds, run with other local authorities, and part funded by DWP.

The Shop Doctor project had also been very successful. He also referred to an event on 6 July designed to help businesses on their journey to Net Zero environmental standards.

A number of funding opportunities were available locally, eg grants or funding for businesses, which were being signposted by the Council in its newsletter, which had a readership of 4000.

Some modelling was required for Business Improvement Districts to analyse business rates paid by companies and ascertain how the Council could help.

In response to a question, it was explained that as this was a HCC function, opportunities to influence Broadband provision in the District were limited, but individual areas were slowly improving. A national Government - subsidised scheme to provide fibre broadband would shortly be underway. The New Forest was treated separately to Hampshire, given the local constraints.

A question was raised concerning the impact on car park use through car parking charges. In reply, it was felt there did not seem to be any significant drop - off in usage or effect on shopping, and noted that most other local authorities charged and there were good reasons for doing so including revenue for regeneration.

14 FINANCIAL STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Panel discussed proposed arrangements for meetings of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group in 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the arrangements for meetings of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group in 2022 be endorsed as set out in the report.

15 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted its future work programme.

Officers sought the Panel's agreement to initiate the work of the Council Tax Schemes Task and Finish Group over the summer, with a view to making its annual report to the Panel in November.

RESOLVED:

That 6 volunteers be sought to sit on the Council Tax Schemes Task and Finish Group over the summer, with a view to making its annual report to the Panel in November.

CHAIRMAN

Digital Strategy

Customer First, Digital by Design

Paul Downton
ICT Service Manager

Objective:

- Approval for the NFDC Digital Strategy 2022-25.

Customer First, Digital by Design

'Customer first, digital by design' is the ethos of the NFDC Digital Strategy. With the following principles at the heart of the strategy:

1. **All services will adopt full end to end digital business models**
2. **All services will actively use data to inform decision making and report performance in real-time**
3. **The council will develop its workforce to realise the business benefits of digital service delivery**
4. **Services will continue to review their capabilities and capacity, reshaping services to leverage the business benefits of digital practices**

The customers of the council are entitled to efficient services that meet their needs. The council will therefore design its services around the needs of our customers, choosing effective and efficient digital solutions to fulfil those needs.

This may include consideration towards the use of robotics where customer behaviours and prescribed end-to-end journeys support this way of working.

We will also design our digital services to accommodate customers who need assistance, or who are unable to navigate our digital solutions.

Our Strategic Digital Goals and Objectives

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Goal	Objective
Robust, reliable systems and support that underpin NFDC service delivery	Accreditation/compliance that affirm that NFDC meets industry standards for security and services
	Resilient ICT environment that provides high availability of systems
	Robust disaster recovery procedures
	Responsive digital/ICT support services
Contemporary working practices achieved through appropriate use of technology	Reliable end-User Devices (EUD) for secure access to council software systems, data and information
	Effective use and adoption of Microsoft 365 by staff and Members
	Digital enabled internal business processes to support flexible/hybrid working
Digital services that reduce operational costs and increase resident and customer satisfaction.	Full end to end digital business models in all 'customer' facing services
	Responsive and effective organisational structures that support digital working practices
	Digital leading Council that uses technology for transparent and efficient, effective governance
	Data driven decision making

Where we begin...

To achieve the goals of the strategy the council will embark on a digital transformation that builds upon its existing investments in technology through services that are customer focused. Offering quick fulfilment, accurate information and an open 'digital door' to our customers. Bringing our customers closer to the council and the services that it offers.

The council will develop a culture that embraces 'Customer First, Digital by Design' through:

Building a 'Customer First, Digital by Design' mindset and shared understanding in the council

Executive Heads and Managers leading by example, always putting the 'Customer first' and following the council's digital principles

Providing the building blocks and exemplar digital services that set the standard for all services to meet or exceed

Defining, developing and acquiring the digital business skills and competencies needed to succeed.

Digital Building Blocks

The development of customer first, digital by design business processes will be facilitated through the provision of a core suite of building blocks.

These building blocks will be used to deliver council services that ensure consistent, efficient and effective service delivery for our residents and customers.

Whilst being capable of inter-operating with service specific software systems.

The building blocks will be available to all services providing the functionality that is universal in all service delivery.

This approach ensures consistency standards for customer engagement and clarity of what functionality is needed when purchasing service specific software

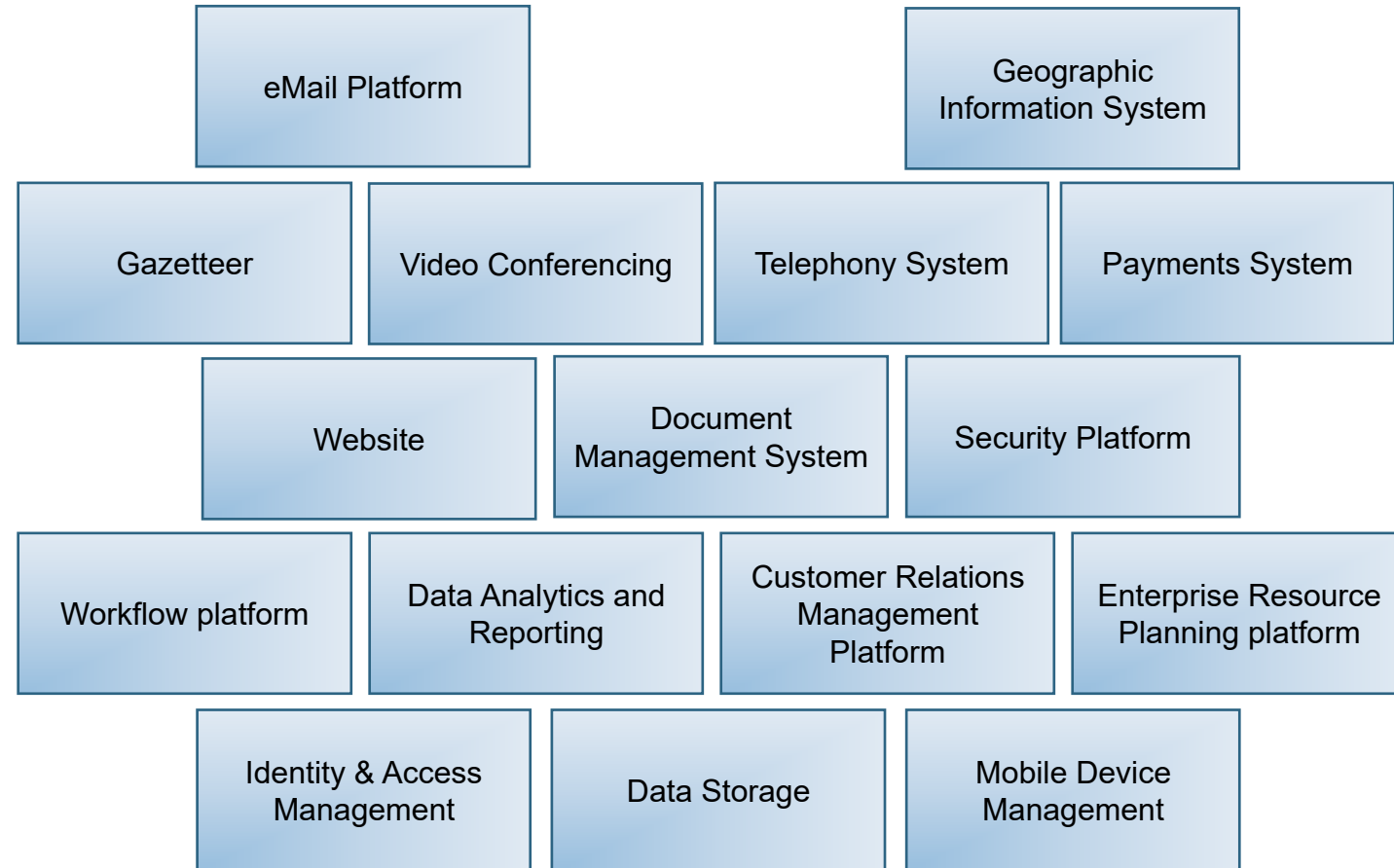


Figure 1. Example of some of the NFDC core digital building blocks

Managing the Strategy

- **Setting the standards**
 - The Digital Strategy contributes to the councils transformation programme and as such sets the expectations for all digital service improvement and transformation.
- **Initiation and Authorisation**
 - To help ensure that intended business benefits are realised when the council invests in technology and new business process. Projects that are delivering the digital strategy will approved by and provide progress reports to the Capital and Change Board.
- **Realising the Benefits**
 - Following the council's project management guidelines will ensure that delivering the business benefits for our customers and the council remains central to all of our digital initiatives

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Resident insight

- = understand our communities
- = improve services
- = direct resources at issues that matter the most

Purpose and outcomes

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Inform, monitor
and evaluate
corporate plan
priorities

Inform service
performance
monitoring and
targets

Provide
organisational
benchmarks

Provide evidence
for decision-
making

Insight in to
different
communities /
demographics

Understand drivers
/ influencers of
reputation

Inform and target
communications
and engagement

Monitor and
understand trends
over time

Measurement metrics - examples

- Leader's portfolio - Perception of initiatives such as Solent Freeport, economic investment, climate
- Planning, regeneration and infrastructure - Perception of meeting local needs
- Housing and homelessness - Perception of meeting local housing need, tackling homelessness
- People and places - do residents feel listened to, perception and behaviours regarding littering
- Finance, investment and corporate services - Perception council is modern and efficient
- Partnering and wellbeing - physical activity levels, mental wellbeing, perception of safety
- Environment and coastal services - Track waste, recycling, climate behaviours and attitudes
- Business, tourism and high streets - shopping behaviours, awareness of local apprenticeship and upskilling opportunities
- Reputation – Satisfaction with area as place to live, with council overall, trust, feeling informed

Demographics – Age, gender, work status, housing tenure, accessibility, ward, house composition, financial situation

Example LGA questions

- Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?
 - Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied
- Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way New Forest District Council runs things?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree that New Forest District Council provides value for money?
- To what extent do you think New Forest District Council acts on the concerns of local residents?
- Overall, how well informed do you think New Forest District Council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?
- How much do you trust New Forest District Council?

Methodology: telephone survey

What this entails

- 750 sample size
- Sample quotas set to ensure representation
- Questionnaire length 15-25 minutes
- Random Digit Dial method

What it achieves / considerations

- Representative
- Reliable and robust results
- Allows for detailed demographic analysis (such as customer personas)

Timescale considerations

Time of year

Fieldwork
length

Questionnaire
consultation

Reporting

Next Steps

- Cabinet report
- Survey – September/October
- Outcomes of survey – December
- Update to Panel – January 2023

Resident insight

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- = understand our communities
- = improve services
- = direct resources at issues that matter the most