

17 APRIL 2023

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 17 April 2023.

- * Cllr Alan O'Sullivan (Chairman)
- * Cllr Neville Penman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Alan Alvey
- * Diane Andrews
- * Ann Bellows
- * Sue Bennison
- * Geoffrey Blunden
- Hilary Brand
- * Alex Brunsdon
- * Fran Carpenter
- Louise Cerasoli
- * Mark Clark
- * Steve Clarke
- * Jill Cleary
- * Anne Corbridge
- * Keith Craze
- * Kate Crisell
- * Sean Cullen
- * Jack Davies
- * Steve Davies
- Arthur Davis
- * Sandra Delemare
- * Philip Dowd
- Jan Duke
- * Barry Dunning
- Jacqui England
- * Richard Frampton
- * Allan Glass
- * Andrew Gossage
- * Michael Harris
- * David Harrison

Councillors:

- * David Hawkins
- Edward Heron
- * Jeremy Heron
- * Alison Hoare
- * Maureen Holding
- * Christine Hopkins
- Mahmoud Kangarani
- * Joshua Kidd
- * Emma Lane
- * Martyn Levitt
- Alexis McEvoy
- Ian Murray
- * Stephanie Osborne
- * Caroline Rackham
- Alvin Reid
- * Joe Reilly
- * Barry Rickman
- Tony Ring
- * Steve Rippon-Swaine
- * David Russell
- Ann Sevier
- * Michael Thierry
- Beverley Thorne
- * Derek Tipp
- * Neil Tungate
- * Alex Wade
- * Malcolm Wade
- * Christine Ward
- * John Ward

*Present

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, James Carpenter, Grainne O'Rourke and Matt Wisdom.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Brand, Davis, Duke, England, E Heron, Kangarani, McEvoy, Reid, Ring, Sevier and Thorne.

71 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2023, subject to the correction of the attendance list, be confirmed.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

Cllr Rackham, for transparency purposes, declared her membership of the Totton Neighbourhood Plan Group.

73 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Former Councillor Gwen Meaden

The Chairman referred with great sadness to the recent passing of former Councillor Gwen Meaden. Gwen was first elected to the District Council in 1991, to the Sway ward. She served on the Policy and Resources, and Leisure Services Committees during her four years of service to the Council, which included representing the District on the outside body - Lymington Recreation Centre Consultative Committee.

The Chairman expressed his sincere condolences to Gwen's family and friends and on behalf of the Council, placed on record thanks for the service she had given to the District.

Engagements

The Chairman referred to the following recent engagements:-

5 March

Attended a lunch organised by the Mayor of Winchester to help raise funds for three charities, Trinity Winchester, The British Heart Foundation and Winchester Hospice, held at Abbey House, Winchester.

9 March

Attended the grand opening of the Fort Climate Centre in Beaulieu, in the presence of the Countess of Wessex (now the Duchess of Edinburgh).

16 March

Attended the Chairman of East Hampshire District Council's Civic Morning, which included a guided tour of Gilbert White House.

Attended the grand opening of Hythe and Dibden War Memorial Hospital, together with a tour of the facilities, which was postponed towards the end of last year.

21 March

Attended the Civic Day of the Chairman of Hart District Council, which was called "The Old and The New". It commenced with a presentation from Dr Nick Maslin, entitled "Mapping the Heritage of Hart" at the Elvetham and a tour of the historic Elvetham site. Guests then relocated to Hartland Village, Fleet for the second part of the day to discover various aspects of the development of Hartland Village Community, including a short tour.

27 March

Welcomed new Council employees, accompanied by the Leader and Chief Executive.

13 April

Attended an event hosted by the Lord Mayor of Southampton, in support of her charities, City Reach Youth Project, Southampton Street Pastors and Southampton Hospitals Charity.

Civic Service

The Chairman referred to his Civic Service, held on 12 March, at St Mary Magdalene Church, New Milton.

The service was attended by the Right Honourable Sir Desmond Swayne, Civic Heads, District and Parish Councillors, including the Vice-Chairman, friends and family. The Chairman expressed his thanks to Reverend Andrew Bailey who held the service, as one of his final official events before his retirement.

74 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

75 REPORTS OF THE CABINET

The Leader of the Council presented the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 1 March 2023 and moved that it be received. Cllr Andrews seconded the motion.

Paragraph 1 – Leader's Announcements (Minute No 84)

The Council was pleased to support a vote of thanks to all the Council staff for their work to support residents, communities and indeed councillors during the four years of the current administration.

Paragraph 5 – Totton Community Engagement (Minute No 91)

One Member highlighted the challenges facing Totton in respect of car parking. It was suggested that a review would need to be undertaken in light of empty car parks, which was not in the best interest of the local community and businesses.

A number of Members discussed the initiatives in their own wards for supporting vibrant high streets. It was acknowledged that the new Council would need to consider its car parking strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

The Leader then presented the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 April 2023 and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr Andrews seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the recommendations be adopted.

76 QUESTIONS

There were none.

77 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A

Questions were put and answered under Standing Order 22A as follows:-

- Cllr M Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Blunden, on Accredited Community Safety Officers.
- From Cllr Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Coastal Services, Cllr S Davies, on flooding.
- From Cllr Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Investment and Corporate Services, Cllr J Heron, on extraordinary debts owed to the Council.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Leader of the Council on the protection of Dibden Bay and the Solent Freeport.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Blunden, on services at Lymington Health and Leisure Centre.

Note:-

A copy of the full questions and replies are attached to these minutes.

78 NOMINATIONS FOR THE OFFICES OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman invited Members to propose and second the nominations for the offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council received in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Cllr O'Sullivan moved that Cllr Penman be the Council's nomination for the office of Chairman of the Council for 2023/24. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr Rackham moved that Cllr Cullen be the Council's nomination for the office of Chairman of the Council for 2023/24. Cllr J Davies seconded the motion.

Members debated the nominations.

Put to a secret ballot, Cllr Penman received the majority of votes.

Cllr Penman moved that Cllr Hawkins be the Council's nomination for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2023/24. Cllr Hopkins seconded the motion.

Cllr A Wade moved that Cllr Kangarani be the Council's nomination for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2023/24. Cllr Osborne seconded the motion.

Members debated the nominations.

Put to a secret ballot, Cllr Hawkins received the majority of votes.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's Nominations for the Offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2023/24, be as follows-

Chairman – Cllr Penman
Vice-Chairman – Cllr Hawkins

79 ALLOCATION OF SEATS AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND PANELS

The Leader of the Council moved the adoption of the recommendations contained within the report, which asked the Council to make appointments to committees and panels in accordance with the principles as set out in Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Cllr Andrews seconded the motion.

The Council, having received both the wishes of the political groups and the preferences of the non-aligned Members, considered the option to allocate seats to the non-aligned Members as nearly as possible in proportion to the number of those members on the Council.

RESOLVED:

1. That the allocation of seats to committees and panels in accordance with the principles set out in the report, be agreed as at paragraph 4.6 of the report; and
2. That the Council gives effect to the wishes of the political groups in making appointments to these Committees and Panels, for the remainder of the four year period ending May 2023.

CHAIRMAN

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FULL COUNCIL – 17 APRIL 2023 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A

Question 1

From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Blunden

The Liberal Democrats in Hythe and Dibden brought in Accredited Community Safety Officers to support the response to community safety issues the Police do not have the resources to deal with. Would this authority work with Town and Parish councillors across the New Forest to bring back a community safety service to the whole District?

Answer:

The New Forest District was one of the pilot areas in Hampshire which introduced the role of Accredited Community Safety Officers in 2004 to support the community in dealing with incidents of low level anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime. The service was initially launched in four areas including Basingstoke and Deane, Gosport, and Havant, with an average of six officers covering the New Forest District area. The role out of Accredited Community Safety Officers pre-dated the introduction and roll out of Hampshire Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), providing a new resource model when addressing low level crime, ASB and community reassurance.

Following a review in early 2014 by Hampshire County Council and relevant contributing authorities, the Accredited Community Support Officer scheme was withdrawn as it was identified that the work of the service overlapped with the role of the PCSOs. This model of Police engagement and community reassurance has extended further with the New Forest being supported by 20 full time PCSOs.

The District Council, through its partnership arrangements with the Safer New Forest Strategy & Delivery Group, in consultation with members of New Forest Association of Local Councils (NFALC), formulate an annual strategic and operational partnership plan to tackle and reduce crime and disorder within the District. This Partnership is an extremely successful partnership, bringing together resources from the Police, Hampshire County Council, the Probation Service and other statutory partners. The Council plays a lead role in that Partnership, I am pleased to say.

As Members will know from this Administration's budget set just two months ago, we have committed a further £300,000 to be spent on enhancing our public space CCTV network to include additional areas of coverage and this will be done in consultation with local Town and Parish Councils to inform local needs. All of these actions, including our commitment to and support of the wider community safety partnership, will continue to ensure the New Forest District area remains a safe place to live, work and visit. This has been borne out by our recent Residents Insight Survey.

Members, I am delighted to see the Council playing a leading role in helping to keep our District a safe place to live, work and visit.

Note – in response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the work of the Council in to reduce crime and disorder as part of the partnership arrangements and reiterated that a need for ACSOs had not been identified with partners.

Question 2

From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Coastal Services, Cllr Steve Davies

What is the administration doing to address the flooding we are experiencing? Recently, Shore road in Hythe was impassable. The water was so deep it would have entered even a 4x4 car outside the sailing club. Beaulieu was flooded by the river and huge congestion built up as cars could only pass on the kerb side.

Answer:

Thank you Cllr Osborne for your question which raises concerns that many share; the potential impact of flooding is a concern to us all. As you will no doubt be aware there are various partner organisations with responsibilities for flooding, particularly where it is coastal or fluvial. In fact, these concerns were discussed in December when, with Steve Cook (Service Manager Coastal), I met with Hythe's Cllr Dowd and a resident.

As was explained in that meeting, this is a case where the flooding referred to would appear to be the remit of the Environment Agency. With regards to Hythe, we are aware that the Environment Agency has a proposal to undertake an FCERM, a Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for the eastern side of the district. Specifically, the FCERM will cover the Lymington to Redbridge coastline in its forward programme of work - this is provisionally planned for commencement in 2025/26.

I have asked our officers to forward on the concerns you have raised to our contacts at the Environment Agency so that they can be aware of the localised issues that you have raised and I will share any response received directly with you.

I note your comments about Beaulieu. I've seen the results of spring tides on the river banks and adjacent roads a few times – this matter is again one to be discussed with our environment partners and I would think the land owners - Beaulieu estates.

Question 3

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Investment and Corporate Services, Cllr Jeremy Heron

Can the Portfolio Holder for Finance please outline at the close of this administration what key extraordinary debts are outstanding to this authority and the level of any debts outstanding to any other authority in the form of loans from NFDC?

Answer:

Cllr Clark, as there is no activity out-of-the ordinary planned between now, and the date of the election, I have used the 31st March as the year-end date to answer your questions, as opposed to forecasting to the election date in May.

In terms of extraordinary debts, I can assure the Councillor we have none that would be considered extraordinary.

The Council provided a loan facility to the New Forest Enterprise Centre during 2022, to support a major maintenance project at the centre. The Council has a significant vested interest in the operation of the centre, and has 3 members on the board of directors. The loan was issued on commercial terms, and as of the 31st March, there is £300,000

outstanding. The outstanding loan has not yet surpassed its expiry date, and in fact the directors opted to repay some of the initial loan early during January 2023.

In terms of lending to other Local Authorities, as allowable through the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, a strategy approved and adopted by this full Council, the Council had no loans outstanding as at the 31st March.

Question 4

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

Would the current administration let us know exactly how they're going to safeguard Dibden Bay from development after allowing it to be included in the freeport area?

Answer:

As has been discussed a number of times, any development on this site will need planning permission either from the District Council or the Secretary of State depending on the scale of the development. As and when there is a proposal, the impact of the development on the environment will be fully assessed. Designation as a tax site within the Freeport in no way changes or impacts on this process.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on what NFDC would do in the event of the scale of the development being a matter for the Secretary of State to determine, the Leader confirmed that this would be a matter for the new administration post May 2023.

Question 5

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Geoff Blunden

Will any pressure be put on Freedom Leisure by the Council to re-open the sauna and steam room permanently at Lyminster Health and Leisure Centre?

Answer:

I am really pleased that Freedom Leisure have taken the decision to trial the re-opening of the Sauna and Steam room facilities, initially at Lyminster and Totton Health and Leisure centres. They intend to capture usage data and customer feedback over the period of the trial, and will make an informed decision on whether permanent re-opening makes good business sense. It certainly wouldn't be sensible for me to commit to exerting pressure on a permanent re-opening, considering these facilities are high consumers of energy, if data down the line suggests an extremely low level of usage.

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