

**26 FEBRUARY 2024**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 26 February 2024.

- \* Cllr Neville Penman (Chairman)
- \* Cllr David Hawkins (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

- \* Alan Alvey
- \* Peter Armstrong
- \* Geoffrey Blunden
- \* Hilary Brand
- \* Mark Clark
- \* Steve Clarke
- \* Jill Cleary
- \* Keith Craze
- \* Kate Crisell
- \* Sean Cullen
- \* Jack Davies
- \* Steve Davies
- \* Philip Dowd
- \* Barry Dunning
- Jacqui England
- \* Allan Glass
- \* David Harrison
- \* Matthew Hartmann
- \* John Haywood
- \* Jeremy Heron
- \* Nigel Linford
- \* Patrick Mballa
- \* Colm McCarthy

**Councillors:**

- \* David Millar
- Neil Millington
- \* Ian Murray
- \* Stephanie Osborne
- \* Alan O'Sullivan
- \* Adam Parker
- \* Dave Penny
- \* Dan Poole
- \* Caroline Rackham
- \* Alvin Reid
- \* Joe Reilly
- \* Janet Richards
- \* Barry Rickman
- Steve Rippon-Swaine
- \* John Sleep
- \* Michael Thierry
- \* Derek Tipp
- \* Neil Tungate
- \* Alex Wade
- \* Malcolm Wade
- \* Christine Ward
- \* Phil Woods
- \* Richard Young

\*Present

**Officers Attending:**

Kate Ryan, Tanya Coulter, Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Richard Knott, Chris Noble, Matt Wisdom, Daniel Reynafarje and Karen Wardle.

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs England, Millington and Rippon-Swaine.

**55 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2023, be confirmed.

**56 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

All Members of the Council had been granted the necessary dispensations to speak and vote on the Scheme of Members' Allowances, the annual budget and setting of the Council tax for 2024/25.

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

Cllr A Wade declared, for transparency purposes, his employment by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority, a precepting authority in respect of the overall level of Council tax.

Cllr J Davies declared, for transparency purposes, his employment by a taxi operator, subject to the fees and charges in respect of the licensing service for 2024/25.

**57 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS****Former Cllr Paul Woods**

The Chairman reported with great sadness the recent passing of former Cllr Paul Woods.

Paul was first elected to NFDC in May 1999 to the Becton Ward, serving 4 terms on this Council before standing down in May 2015, giving 16 years of service to the Council.

Paul sat on many committees during his time with the Council, including the Appeals Committee, Corporate Overview Panel, Environment Review Panel, which he chaired for 5 years between 2002 and 2007 and the Planning Committee.

Paul served on a number of outside bodies, including Forest Arts Consultative Committee and the New Forest Road Safety Committee. He also served on the Project Integra Management Board, holding the Deputy Chairman position during 2003/04.

Paul held the office of Chairman of the Council for 2008/09.

The Chairman would represent the Council at Paul's funeral, which would take place at 12.00 noon on 6 March, at New Forest Crematorium, New Milton.

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

**Engagements**

The Chairman reported on the following recent engagements:-

**13 January**

A service of welcome to the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen as the 98th Bishop of Winchester. The Bishop was accompanied by the Archdeacon of Canterbury and officers of the Diocese.

21 January

The Mayor of Fareham Borough Council hosted a Civic Church service at St Peter's Church in Titchfield.

24 January

The Chairman was honoured to cut the ribbon to officially open Penman House, transforming the site of the former Testwood Social Club on Salisbury Road. These new homes meet the Government's proposed Future Home Standards.

25 January

The regular meet and greet session with new NFDC employees at Appletree Court.

4 February

The Civic Service for the Chairman of East Hampshire District Council, at St Peter's Church in Petersfield.

9 February

The Mayor of Christchurch held a charity concert at Christchurch Priory, with music from the Christchurch and District Town Band, La Nova singers and a special guest soloist, John Starkes. The event was in support of SSAFA, the Armed Forces Charity, and the Water Lily Project, a Christian charity that is passionate about supporting and empowering women across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole areas and helping them back to independent living.

11 February

The Mayor of Gosport's Civic Service at the Freedom Church. The theme was 'Love Ukraine' and the Chairman was honoured to be personally mentioned for his community work in Totton.

24 February

Supported the Mayor of New Milton's nominated charity, Ashley Family Hub, at the South Lawn Hotel in Milford on Sea.

**Procedures**

The Chairman referred to the significant amount of business for the meeting, including a number of required recorded votes on key budget decisions. He welcomed Members' support in the smooth running of the meeting.

**58 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS****Waste Strategy and Service**

The Leader reported that she had wrote a letter to the Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Council with regards the need for certainty regarding the future collection model and the associated financial support. This was in light of the Council's own planning for the

implementation of a new waste service and the impact of ongoing uncertainty. This had also been pursued by the District Councils Network. Since then, the Government had confirmed that £1.8m of capital funding for food waste vehicles and containers would be provided before the end of this financial year. Council officers continued to discuss this and ongoing revenue funding with Defra as the Council worked to finalise the Waste Strategy implementation plans.

### **Southern Water**

The Leader acknowledged that Members shared her concerns over the performance of Southern Water during the recent water supply disruption. She had written a joint letter with Leaders across Hampshire and Southampton to Southern Water and forwarded a copy of this to Members. The Leader today represented the Council with the Chief Executive at a meeting and pressed for early investment to prevent New Forest residents bearing the brunt of water shortages every time there is an issue with Testwood lakes.

### **Ringwood Brewery**

The Leader referred to a request in December, as to what the Council was doing in relation to the announced closure of Ringwood Brewery by the Carlsberg and Marston Brewing Company (CMBC). She had committed to meet with a representative of a local consortium who were looking to take the brewery on going forward. The Leader subsequently had that discussion and also met face to face with senior representatives from the CMBC, to outline the Council's disappointment that the brewery was closed with short notice and that local people feel they were not given the opportunity to progress with a purchase. The Leader was keen to discuss whether there was any prospect of resurrecting the proposals to retain the brewery and the iconic Ringwood brands.

CMBC asserted that detailed discussions did take place with one group of local business people but no viable proposition came forward. To date, the Council had been unable to verify that position. CMBC additionally stated that the Ringwood brands were no longer for sale. The Leader highlighted her disappointment, as the brands would be key to taking forward any proposal to continue brewing in the town.

CMBC did provide assurances that the brewing equipment would remain in the premises until the site is sold and, as such, the option is still there for interested parties to work with them.

Further to the Leader's statement in December, there is a limit to the influence that the Council has over the actions of a private company. She hoped there would be a positive outcome, despite this appearing unlikely given CMBC's current position. The Leader's door remained open both to CMBC and local business people, should a positive way forward emerge.

## **59 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024/25**

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 26 January 2024. Cllr Hartmann seconded the motion.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Council approve:-

- (a) The Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 including the Annual Treasury Management Investment Strategy for 2024/25 (and the remainder for 2023/24) and the Treasury Indicators contained within Annex A of the Audit Committee report; and
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, who in turn delegates to Hampshire County Council's Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Operations, as agreed in the Service Level Agreement, to manage all Council investments and borrowing according to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement as appropriate.

#### **60 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2024/25**

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 26 January 2024. Cllr Hartmann seconded the motion.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Investment Strategy 2024/25 be approved.

#### **61 LICENSING SERVICE FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25**

Cllr Tungate introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting held on 5 January 2024. In doing so, he confirmed that objections had been received to the proposed tax licensing fees and therefore recommendation ii was no longer applicable for the Council meeting. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Council:-

- (a) Approves the proposed fees (with the exception of tax licence fees) for financial year 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report; and
- (b) Delegates authority to General Purposes and Licensing Committee to make the decision as to the level of tax licensing fees for 2024/25 should objections to the proposed fees be raised during the public consultation period.

#### **62 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25**

Cllr Cleary introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the HR Committee meeting held on 11 January 2024. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 at Appendix 1, be approved.

**63 REPORT OF CABINET - 7 FEBRUARY 2024****PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 7 February 2024.

**PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL****Item 2 – Asset Maintenance and Replacement Programme and General Fund Capital Programme 2024/25**

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council approve:-

- (a) The schedule of projects, as included at Appendix 1 and 2 of the Cabinet report, within the 2024/25 budget, noting this commits the Council to expenditure beyond 2024/25 whereby a project commences in 2024/25 and extends into future years; and
- (b) The Vehicle & Plant replacement programme, for a 2-year period, covering purchases due in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

**Item 3 – Capital Strategy 2024/25**

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Capital Strategy 2024/25 be approved, including the adoption of the MRP statement.

**Item 4 – Community Grants 2024/25**

Cllr Poole introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council approve:-

- (a) The Community Grant awards, totalling £130,000 in revenue grants and £96,040 in capital grants, as set out in Appendix 1 (of the report to Cabinet), and in more detail in Appendix 2, be approved for inclusion in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2024/25;
- (b) The proposed recommendations as set out in section 4.2 of the report to Cabinet.

- (c) The Community Transport grants totalling £51,100, as set out in section 5.5 of the report to Cabinet along with the recommendation to respond to the HCC consultation, as detailed in 5.7.

### **Item 5 – Local Plan Review**

Cllr Tipp introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A number of Members highlighted the importance of moving forward with a new local plan at this stage, to meet the needs of the District. This would include engaging with developers and communities to also understand if any undelivered parts of the current local plan could be retained to meet housing needs. Ensuring a positive relationship with Town and Parish Councils as part of the neighbourhood plan process was also highlighted.

In responding to the debate, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that consultation would be undertaken throughout the process and the Council was committed to meeting with Town and Parish Councils as part of neighbourhood planning.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Council agree to:-

- (a) Commence a full review of the adopted Local Plan, to include Local Plan Part 1: Planning Strategy 2020 and policies saved from earlier local plans, and the preparation of a Design Code(s) for the Plan Area;
- (b) Publish the updated Local Development Scheme work programme at appendix one, initially to cover financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26;
- (c) Approve an initial Local Plan budget covering the next two financial years of £700,000, noting that £370,000 is currently allocated in a specific reserve, and that statutory increases in planning fees are expected to yield an additional income of £265,000 over this initial two year period to further contribute towards the cost to complete the full review;
- (d) Approve a budget of £200,000 to cover the preparation of a Design Code(s) for the Plan Area;
- (e) Agree to update the Statement of Community Involvement to set out how the public and other interested parties will be consulted and can participate in the Local Plan review; and
- (f) Agree to the formation of a cross-party working group to provide wider Member engagement, oversight and scrutiny into the preparation of the Local Plan.

### **Item 6 – Tenant Engagement Strategy**

Cllr S Davies introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

One Member highlighted that with 18 responses received to the consultation, it may have warranted revisiting the consultation process prior to adopting the proposed

strategy. Related to this, a Member suggested that a Key Performance Indicator arising from the new corporate plan ought to consider the quality and quantity of consultation with tenants. It was hoped that with a new, proactive strategy, this could be positively progressed.

Some Members considered that low numbers of consultation responses often indicated satisfaction with proposals. Contrary views were also expressed that whilst the new strategy was a welcome step, low numbers of consultation responses were indicative of poor engagement in the past.

Portfolio Holder responded to debate and welcomed support for the policy. He concluded by highlighting in particular the future of local engagement hubs to hear directly from tenants.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Tenant Engagement Strategy be approved and adopted.

**Item 7 – Members’ Allowances – Scheme to Apply from 1 April 2024**

Cllr Cleary introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Council agree that the current scheme of members’ allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2024; and
- (b) That officers be requested to make the necessary arrangements for a meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel in Autumn this year, to review and make recommendations on the Council’s Members’ Allowances Scheme in the light of 12months’ operation under the new 48 Member Council structure.

**64 REPORT OF CABINET - 21 FEBRUARY 2024**

**PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no items resolved by Cabinet in this report.

**PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

**Item 1 – Waste Strategy Implementation – Revised Timeline and Financial Appraisal**

Cllr Blunden introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council agree that:-

- (a) Officers proceed to take the necessary decisions to implement the service changes for refuse collection, recycling and food waste collections as set



out in Section 5 of the Cabinet report, in readiness for commencement of the new service in Spring 2025;

- (b) The budget requirements as set out in section 7 of the Cabinet report are approved, noting that these are included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. Council notes in particular the anticipated service roll out costs for 2025/26 at £1.4 million, with a likely offset of £0.8 - £1.2 million through the receipt of EPR funding, and the additional budget requirement for transitional costs, increasing from £1.224 million to £1.825 million;
- (c) Officers continue procurement processes to secure the necessary vehicles, wheeled bins, food caddies and other containers, including ancillary services in order to deliver the new service; and
- (d) Officers continue to work with Hampshire County Council and other Hampshire partners to identify the best long-term solution to recycling collections and processing to meet the Government requirements and return to Cabinet for a final decision.

## **Item 2 – Housing Revenue Account Budget and the Housing Sector Capital Expenditure Programme 2024/25**

Cllr S Davies introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

The recommendations were put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, Brand, Clark, Clarke, Cleary, Craze, Crisell, Cullen, J Davies, S Davies, Dowd, Dunning, Glass, Harrison, Hartmann, Hawkins, Haywood, Heron, Linford, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Murray, O'Sullivan, Osborne, Parker, Penman, Penny, Poole, Rackham, Reid, Reilly, Richards, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, A Wade, M Wade, Ward, Woods, Young.

Voting against:- None.

Abstaining:- None.

The recommendations were carried unanimously, 45 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstaining.

### **RESOLVED:**

That Council approve the HRA budget and housing public sector capital expenditure programme for 2024/25, as follows:-

- (a) That from 01 April 2024, an increase in rents of 7.7% from the 2023/24 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;
- (b) That from 01 April 2024, an increase in garage rents of 15% from the 2023/24 weekly rent level be agreed;
- (c) That from 01 April 2024, an increase in shared ownership property rents of 9.4% from the 2023/24 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government

guidelines of RPI +0.5%, be agreed, and that the weekly rent of one additional property sold under previous legislation be increased by 7.7%;

- (d) That from 01 April 2024 the new disaggregated approach to Service charges, which will reflect transparent and up to date annual charges for all eligible communal and domestic charges incurred by the Council, be agreed;
- (e) That the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report, be agreed; and
- (f) That a Housing Capital Programme to 2026/27, as set out in Appendix 4 of the Cabinet report, be agreed.

### **Item 3 – Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget 2024/25**

The Chairman used his discretion to allow the Leader of the Council and the Leaders of the Opposition Groups only to exceed the time limit for making budget speeches. He highlighted his intention to attempt to facilitate one budget debate on the recommendations from Cabinet and any single alternative proposal, also at his discretion. However, should more than one amendment be tabled, he indicated that these would be dealt with one at a time, for clarity.

The Leader of the Council made a statement on the budget as proposed in the report of the Cabinet dated 21 February 2024, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group made a statement and moved an amendment in the form of an alternative budget. Cllr Clark seconded the amendment. A copy of the alternative budget was circulated to all Members as a supplementary agenda item and a copy of the statement made is attached to these minutes.

The Council debated the Cabinet's budget proposals together with the alternative budget.

The alternative budget was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Brand, Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Dowd, Harrison, Haywood, Linford, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, Rackham, Reilly, A Wade, M Wade and Woods.

Voting against:- Cllrs Alvey, Blunden, Clarke, Cleary, Craze, Crisell, S Davies, Dunning, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Heron, Murray, O'Sullivan, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, Ward and Young.

Abstaining:- Cllrs Armstrong, Parker and Richards.

The amendment and alternative budget was lost, 17 in favour, 25 against, 3 abstaining.

The substantive motion of the budget as outlined in the report of the Cabinet dated 21 February 2024 was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Alvey, Blunden, Clarke, Cleary, Craze, Crisell, S Davies, Dunning, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Heron, Murray, O'Sullivan, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Richards, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, Ward and Young.

Voting against:- Cllrs Brand, Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Dowd, Harrison, Haywood, Linford, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, Rackham, Reilly, A Wade, M Wade and Woods.

Abstaining:- Cllrs Armstrong and Parker.

The substantive motion and budget as outlined in the report of the Cabinet dated 21 February 2024 was carried, 26 in favour, 17 against, 2 abstaining.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council agree that:-

- (a) The updated MTFP and financial strategy, as set out in the Cabinet report and throughout appendices 1-3, are approved;
- (b) There is a General Fund Net Budget Requirement in 2024/25 of £24,513,250, as set out in appendices 5a - d to the Cabinet report;
- (c) The New Forest District Council Band D Council Tax for 2024/25 shall be £199.79;
- (d) The Council approves the formal determination (appendix 6), as required by the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023, to apply Council Tax premiums to dwellings occupied periodically and long-term empty dwellings, for implementation from 1 April 2025;
- (e) The General Fund Capital Programme for 2024/25 of £16.579 million, as set out in appendix 7 to the Cabinet report be approved; and
- (f) The proposed fees and charges as included at appendix 8 to the Cabinet report be approved.

**65 THE 2024/25 COUNCIL TAX**

The Council considered the Council Tax for 2024/25.

The Leader moved the recommendations in the report. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

The recommendations were put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, Clarke, Cleary, Craze, Crisell, S Davies, Dunning, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Heron, Linford, Murray, O'Sullivan, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Richards, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, Ward and Young.

Voting against:- Cllr Reilly.

Abstaining:- Cllrs Brand, Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Dowd, Harrison, Haywood, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, Parker, Rackham, A Wade, M Wade and Woods.

The recommendations were carried, 28 in favour, 1 against, 16 abstaining.

**RESOLVED:**

That the recommendations be approved.

**66 QUESTIONS**

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

- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on the Local Plan.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on planning in a National Park area.
- From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on missing refuse and recycling bags.
- From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on property assessments for the new Waste Strategy.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the Car Parking Strategy.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Chairman of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee, Cllr Tungate, on the draft Taxi Licensing Policy.

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

**67 NOTICE OF MOTION - WASTE AND RECYCLING CENTRES**

In accordance with Standing Order 21, Cllr J Davies moved the following motion:-

*“This Council is concerned by Hampshire County Council's plans to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres.*

*This Council believes these plans will increase fly-tipping in the New Forest and mean more money is spent by New Forest District Council on removing fly-tipped waste.*

*This Council calls for a corporate response to the consultation to be prepared expressing this council's opposition to the closure of any New Forest Recycling Centre.*

*This Council further calls on the Leader of the Council to write to the Government highlighting the dire financial situation of local authorities and urging the Government to make more funding available so local authorities do not have to cut vital public services.”*

Cllr Rackham seconded the motion.

The Chairman referred to the provisions of Standing Order 42, which stated that the motion should stand referred to the body within whose terms of reference the subject matter of the motions comes, or the Cabinet or such Committees or Panels

that the Council may determine. The Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel would in due course be considering a report on the Chief Finance Officer's proposed corporate response to the Hampshire County Council consultation referenced in the motion. On that basis, it was considered appropriate to refer the motion to the Panel to be considered as part of this piece of work.

**RESOLVED:**

That the motion be referred to the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

**68 SENIOR LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS**

The Council officers named in the report left the room for this item of business.

The Leader of the Council moved the recommendations in the report. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Members of the Council spoke in support of the proposed appointments.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council approves:-

- (a) The appointment of Richard Knott as Strategic Director – Housing and Communities of New Forest District Council; and
- (b) The appointment of Tanya Coulter as Monitoring Officer of New Forest District Council (substantive post – Assistant Director – Governance).

**69 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

There were no changes.

CHAIRMAN

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## Leader's Budget Speech 2024

Once again, the Council's conservative administration is delivering a financially sound balanced budget. It is once again a budget that invests in valued services. It is a budget with a clear plan as to how we will look to achieve savings and generate additional income to further support and enhance what we do for our communities.

As a responsible administration, we continue to take pro-active steps in order to protect the medium to long term financial sustainability of this authority. That is what a conservative administration who are in this for the long haul does. We do not include unaffordable political gestures in our budget. Instead, we make sound decisions today, that result in a well-manged and well-funded New Forest District Council for years to come. I have every intention of ensuring this Council has no financial difficulties brought about through any decisions that we as the administration make. Instead, will we commit to a strategic approach, and take decisions with our eyes open, based on expert advice and facts, at the right time, and at the right financial level. Investing in this strategic approach is vital to our success, that is why the budget proposes investment in both a Parking Strategy and in a vehicle and fleet infrastructure strategy. Both will seek to modernise and improve the services we offer, and have the potential to make a significant difference in our desire to become a cleaner and greener Council.

In order to be financially responsible we have to take key decisions on things like increases to our housing rents, our Fees and Charges, and of course this authorities' level of Council Tax.

When it comes to housing rents, we're not looking to deviate away from central government policy, and so intend to follow the guideline of CPI plus one percent for our headline housing rent.

For fees and charges, we think it right that users of chargeable services pay a fair price, and a price that reflects the cost of delivering that service. Where we can be, we are also commercial in our approach, charging market rates for some services, so that net income generation can then support the delivery of other priority and critical services.

The proposed level of Council Tax for the 24/25 financial year represents a band D charge of just three pounds and eighty three pence per week. Three pounds and eighty three pence per week for all that this Council provides I

believe is exceptional value. Value that is only going to get better as a result of our investment in Council wide transformation, striving for better services at a lower overall cost, demonstrating well the administrations understanding of the need to provide value for money in all that we do.

And whilst some in our communities are supported with paying their Council Tax through the Council's adopted Reduction Scheme, there are some who can afford to pay more. This is why I am proposing the Council make use of new council tax premiums allowable as a result of recent new government legislation. With effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, second homes located within the district will be charged an additional 100%, and empty homes will be charged an additional 100% after a period of 1 year, as opposed to the current 2. This will not only provide additional revenue to the council to further support critical services, but will also encourage homes to be brought back into use more quickly supporting the housing supply within the district.

I'm extremely pleased that within our budget, good growth in our business rates proves that business sentiment and performance within the District overall is strong. And small businesses will once again be supported with 100% government funded business rate relief meaning that a qualifying business with a rateable value of twelve thousand pounds or less won't have paid a penny in business rates since 2011. Overall, Business Rates, whether paid for by the businesses or funded by the government, support our 24/25 budget with eight point seven million pounds in retained funding. Rest assured, if any government think they will be able to significantly reduce our share of rates collected from businesses within our administrative area in any future fair funding reset, they will not do so without a fight from this conservative administration.

I recall last year, the leader of the opposition stating that our revenue budget didn't need to make contributions to our capital programme. And it was said recently that every penny spent should be on services delivering to our residents. But that's exactly what we do. Our plan outlines that we will be delivering a new depot at Hardley and enhancing our facilities at Marsh Lane and Ringwood ready to deliver our new waste service; a service delivered to every resident. We will be renovating St Georges Hall in Calshot and revitalising the offer for the local community. We have taken the bold step to develop our new Local Plan and local design code and have made provision for this within our budget and we will be delivering on our manifesto promise to enhance



CCTV provision across the District as we know how much our residents value feeling safe.

Over the next 3 years, the budget includes thirty-nine million pounds of proposed capital spending on General Fund services, and eighty-seven million pounds of proposed capital spending in the Housing Revenue Account that does nothing else but support the delivery of our key services. That level of spend NEEDS to be funded. It NEEDS to be supported from the revenue budget, it's not a question of choice, it's a fact.

I am extremely proud of this Council's strong reputation for being financially sound and well managed. It is because of that sound financial management that this council is still able to award three hundred and ten thousand pounds in community grants. There aren't many leaders of Councils across the Country that still have these types of sums available to distribute across the community. Yet here we are, supporting Honeypot Childrens charity, New Forest Disability information services, SPUD, the crossings, the handy trust, the list goes on. I know the need out there in our communities is real and is greater than ever before, so in this budget, I pledge to increase that overall grant fund by a further forty thousand pounds for 25/26; an increase of over fourteen percent. This is New Forest District Council doing what it does best, going above and beyond in the delivery of non-statutory services that make a real difference to the New Forest community.

For many members in this chamber this evening, this will be the first time you have the responsibility to agree the Council's budget on behalf of your constituents. It is a responsibility that shouldn't be taken lightly. Decisions taken in the setting of the budget this evening don't just impact the next 12 months, decisions taken expand well beyond that. Members of this chamber are presented with a budget that is able to invest in Council services for the short, medium and long term. And it is a budget that begins to align our services to our newly emerging corporate plan, delivering for people, place and prosperity within the New Forest.

I give thanks to our wonderful staff who have got us here, to those who will fulfil our fully funded aspirations, and I fully support the Housing Revenue Account, General Fund and Council Tax recommendations as proposed.

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## Liberal Democrat Budget Speech 2024

The Conservative budget and post-election financial decisions shows they have learned nothing. The underlying attitude of our council has remained unchanged for over two decades. The Conservative administration, once again at the helm, has failed to learn that doing nothing extra for council tax payers is not how to run a good council.

Looking at end of year out-turns for the last 7 years a pattern emerges. With the exception of one year necessitating a £400,000 top-up, the council consistently budgeted for one figure yet ended up with a significant surplus. This year we will have a £1.97million surplus, a 9.64% reduction on the figure they set in their budget. One could be forgiven for asking the question: are these surpluses a result of a deliberate strategy to accumulate funds or just financial incompetence. These funds originate from the General Fund, financed by council taxpayers to support local services.

So what are they going to do with this surplus? In their budget planning this year, beyond the costs associated with running the authority, what is there for New Forest residents? It does contain £130,000 on naval gazing strategies, such as £50,000 for a strategy for car parks. I am sure any of our residents paying over the odds for parking clocks would be happy to advise the council for free.

Councillors, I maintain faith in our capable officers. Instead of squandering public funds on external consultants, let's leverage our in-house expertise, reserving exceptions for critical tasks like the Local Plan review, so essential for aligning our planning strategies with current needs.

Instead of Tory taking, let us talk about giving, We Liberal Democrats want to see greater use of targeted funding to help those in need and to improve the lives of all our residents.

Economic growth for our local district is as important to our local economy as it is for the national economy. I do not hear anything from our Conservative administration about growing our local economy beyond their wild dreams of the Freeport without any data, facts and the reality of what our residents would get from this venture.

We need a sustainable local economy based upon current and new local thriving businesses with a flourishing Tourist Industry. Therefore we see the economic viability of the district as a priority for the council to focus on. In our budget we propose helping business by extending business rate relief encouraging businesses to use the empty shops in our communities.

NFDC to refocus its commercial strategy to promote multi-purpose units in each of our main settlements. Encourage start-ups by providing office or work space at a reasonable rent along with Council tax breaks. To boost support for tourism we propose having a Tourism coordinator – working directly with Town and Parish Councils, tourism operators and Local History Groups to develop the tourism

infrastructure. In addition producing a self-funding Tourist App help making decisions on where to go easier for visitors to our beautiful district.

Along with that we want to explore new initiatives like promoting street vending Kitchens, where NFDC can encourage start-ups by providing strategic locations at a market rent for potential users to rent, and begin to advertise their presence and encourage the development of a greater variety of food outlets

An essential part of wellbeing is feeling safe in our communities with increasing crime in our district bringing with it an increasing fear of crime. We need to be doing more than just setting up a few extra cameras. We propose a Feasibility study of funding in partnership with Town and Parish council for an ACSO service-repurposing some of the £300,000 CCTV funding service, which can proactively prevent criminal acts by dealing with the low level incidents thus releasing police time to focus on more crime prevention activities.

Helping the young with their wellbeing not only can reduce antisocial behaviour but help them develop positive futures. Therefore engage with HCC and other partners and provide funding for more youth and family hubs, with focus on school holidays, and activities funded throughout the District.

In the 22/23 figures, amongst our New Forest school age children there are 19% on free school meals compared to 18.3% across the county and 18.8% across the South East region. These figures equate to 4,022 children being in poverty. This has risen by 337 children since I brought this to the council attention last year and the Conservative administration refused to do anything. We Liberal Democrats do not believe in standing idly by as our young people suffer. We propose in working with other agencies and providing a grant contribution of £500,000 aimed at reducing child poverty in the New Forest District (£250k over two years).

We have declared a climate and nature emergency. From solar panel installations to incentivising green practices, we must lead by example in combating climate change and preserving our environment. To that end we propose a Feasibility study into putting covered solar panels in NFDC car parks to generate electricity for charging electric vehicles and sell excess power to subsidise car parking costs. This is something that is already happening in other European countries, we should not be falling behind on the green agenda.

Sustainability especially in a time of economic hardship has to be planned and measured, many people are still suffering in the cost of living crisis. Inflation may have dropped but food prices in the shops are still much higher than before as are energy costs and of course ex Conservative prime minister Liz Truss's gift to the nation of higher interest rates. We believe we should reduce the price of parking clock costs to the inflation only level of October 2023 plus any 2024 inflation level increase so they pay for themselves but give something back to the New Forest's hard pressed motorists, who so often have to bear the burden of being a conservative local government's cash cow. We would reduce the long stay clock from £220 to £155, the quarterly long stay clock from £65 to £44 and the short stay

clock from £40 to £33 figures based upon inflation rather than greed as the 2023 rise was based upon.

Art and culture assist in the creation of wellbeing so while the current administration has overseen the demise in the arts in much of the district. We want to bring art and culture back to our communities so we would create Arts Hub/Creative spaces. Develop and formalise the Arts Advocate scheme working to have representatives in each community with local arts and performance venue representation, starting with a 1 year pilot scheme to see how it could take off.

Housing and Homelessness issues should not be as prevalent as they are in our district. The new Local Plan should encourage developers to secure more Housing sites for diverse housing needs and be more proactive in securing public building sites for Housing such as Police Stations.

Now members we can help our communities directly with our community grants so we propose an enhanced budget for NFDC Councillor community grants to be raised to £1200 per member. This would be funded by the savings from the reduction to 48 councillors. To increase incoming revenue we propose to rent out office space at Appletree Court Lyndhurst created by more flexible and hybrid working and look to sell buildings not required in the future..

Our district, apart from being one of the geographically largest in the country, contains diverse communities, from Hythe to Ringwood, Totton to Hyde where one size solutions do not fit it all. We propose to investigate the setting up of Citizen Assemblies, asking participants to look at 3 key topics each year, all relevant to the New Forest District and the communities we serve.

Now, how would we fund it? The administration has been squirreling money away before into reserves, which takes us back to the surpluses or positive variation in modern council speak, surpluses.

The bottom line of course is that none of our proposals negatively impacts the council's finances or the medium term financial plan excepting a reduction in the money going into the capital fund from the general fund, which would potentially bring borrowing year forward to 2027. However as we have huge surpluses each year that would no doubt negate that fact going forward and the benefit for New Forest people now make doing that worthwhile.

We as councillors are elected not only to represent our local residents but to work to improve their quality of life to make our district a great and safe place to live, work and visit. In these challenging times we need to consider this even more and our budget is to help the local economy with helpful initiatives, reduce costs for local people, ideas to make them safer and support the young and improve wellbeing.

Our budget is for a Fairer New Forest, which gives to New Forest people, please support this budget.

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## FULL COUNCIL – 26 FEBRUARY 2024 – QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22

### First Questions

#### Question 1

**From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp**

I'm pleased to see that this Council will be conducting a review of the Local Plan. It is sorely needed. Can the Portfolio Holder promise me that this review will get rid of the stupid policies that allow developers like Churchill free rein to swamp Lymington with luxury retirement flats that locals do not want?

*Answer:*

*You appear to believe that I have great power, to be able to make promises to you based on your perceived knowledge of Lymington's needs. However, I only make promises that I know that I can deliver. I know there are some politicians that promise anything, but not me. It is important to understand how a Local Plan is made. Our officers gave Members a very informative briefing on this on 11 December. Those Members who attended will recall that the review will examine all existing policies to see if they are still fit for purpose.*

*All our policies will be based on data and evidence such as the most recent Census, which tells us that both nationally and locally we have an ageing demographic, indicating an ongoing need for retirement housing, as well as housing with care and care homes. Of course, we will also require affordable homes and a range of homes of different size, type and tenure.*

*I know that Lymington and Pennington Town Council have received an offer from our officers to provide the same briefing that our own councillors received. I hope will be taken up so they can fully appreciate the complexities of plan making, which must be led by evidence and data.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on lobbying for change to National Planning Policy, the Portfolio Holder reiterated the need to follow the data and evidence in plan making.*

#### Question 2

**From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp**

Changes to planning law in October last year make it necessary for any decision by local planning authorities to actively 'further' the interests of the National Park, rather than just not doing anything to its detriment.

How does this relate to what this council would like to see happen to the Dibden Bay site?

*Answer:*

*The Council's formal planning policies on any strategic development proposals at Dibden Bay is set out in policy ECON4 of the Local Plan Part 1 adopted in July 2020.*

*This sets out a variety of environmental, economic and social matters for consideration – including impacts on the New Forest National Park.*

*As we begin work on the Local Plan Review, such policies will need to be reviewed, including taking account of the new duty to further the purposes of the purposes of the New Forest National Park.*

*This Council continues to work closely with the National Park Authority on a wide variety of strategies and projects, for the benefit of our communities both within the National Park, the wider district and more widely.*

*The outcome of our Local Plan Review will inevitably be a compromise which balances the needs of the National Park, as well as those of local people and the business community. It is not a simple case of what the Council would like to see, but rather the best outcome for our community as a whole.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on Dibden’s Bay relation to emerging planning legislation, the Portfolio Holder reiterated that the Council would be taking into account these issues as part of the Local Plan Review.*

### **Question 3**

#### **From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden**

The residents of Lyndhurst and Minstead did not receive their black and recycling bin bags as planned in November. It has come to light that many residents in Minstead have not received them for the last five years despite ringing in to request them. What is the Waste team doing to ensure that this will not happen again and that it is not happening in other parts of the Forest?

*Answer:*

*We have been made aware of a limited number of residents not receiving an anticipated delivery of bin sacks, my apologies for any inconvenience. However, this was corrected with follow up deliveries made. These locations have also been noted for future delivery cycles to receive additional monitoring to make sure the deliveries take place as scheduled.*

*In the medium term, the Council is investing in “in-cab” technology to improve route and round planning to improve the accuracy of services such as this. And of course, I am sure Members will all agree that one of the many positives of our new and improved wheeled bin service, which will maximise recycling rates, will be the fact that we will no longer need nor distribute 10 million single-use virgin plastic sacks per year, which is a massive sustainability benefit.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the use of the Customer Services call centre for establishing trends of complaints, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that the number of complaints the Council received on this issue had not raised the likelihood of widespread missed deliveries.*



#### Question 4

##### **From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden**

Following the changes made to our waste strategy, residents now need to accommodate a 240 litre wheelie bin as well as the more regular-sized wheelie bin, food caddy and glass bin.

With over 90% of properties now assessed I am yet to find a resident who is aware of an assessment taking place. Can you confirm the criteria against which suitability has been judged, given it appears no assessment of the physical property has been undertaken? And can you confirm the current percentage of properties that have been assessed as unsuitable? For those which are unsuitable, can you confirm that there will be no additional charges levied to the residents affected?

*Answer:*

*Thank you for highlighting the fact that the number of bins will be no different to that for so many other council areas across the country, and is in line with the clear commitment of the Prime Minister with his announcements on Simpler Recycling last year, and part of our own local commitment to increase recycling here in the New Forest.*

*I am pleased to confirm that Keep Britain Tidy, who have a wealth of experience on similar projects across the country, have been undertaking the independent survey work. Their experienced surveyors have a list of questions to go through to assess each property, checking for suitable space for bin storage, looking for suitable presentation sites for collection, and assessing for steps or inclines that may make presentation difficult. They have developed software that enables them to link the survey with NFDC's address data to ensure full coverage.*

*We anticipate that up to 5% of properties may be unsuitable for the full wheeled bin offer, but clearly the majority will be, as they are across the country in both rural and urban areas. Additionally, we have roughly 5500 flats that will likely be provided with communal bins rather than individual wheeled bins.*

*There will be a review of the work being undertaken by our own operational teams before a decision is made, and we will write to all properties between now and the formal roll out of the new service to confirm. There will be an opportunity for individual concerns to be raised and reviewed thereafter. I am pleased to advise that the current assisted collection provision remains in place for those with extra needs.*

*We can confirm that no charges will be made for the collection of domestic general waste, food waste and recycling. Charges will continue to apply for the collections of garden waste, bulky waste and business waste.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the percentage of those properties unsuitable for the full wheeled bin offer, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would share the final figure once the assessments had been concluded.*

## **Second Questions**

### **Question 5**

#### **From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoff Blunden**

Will the upcoming parking strategy finally allow parking charges to be specific to local community's needs, with different charges depending on the circumstances of each town?  
Answer:

*The cross-party Parking Strategy Task and Finish Group has now met twice, and has identified a whole range of issues that the strategy will consider. The scope for the strategy, agreed by the Task and Finish Group, includes a "review of current parking policy" and an intention to "consider the impact that any changes to parking provision, payment methods and rates would have on village town centre workers and businesses".*

*It is not possible to second guess the outcome of this review, but I hope that this reassures the Councillor that issues such as this will be considered in full as part of the Strategy.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on spending surplus income on public transport, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that Hampshire County Council were responsible of public transport.*

### **Question 6**

#### **From Cllr Jack Davies to the Chairman of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee, Cllr Tungate**

Taxi Drivers and Operators have been in touch with me to discuss the new "age of vehicle" proposals included in the draft taxi licensing policy. Could the Committee Chairman explain how this would work in practice? Would a car that is currently compliant need to be changed when this new policy comes into force? That could get very costly for drivers and operators.

Answer:

*The proposed Taxi Licensing Policy contains new measures relating to the ages of vehicles. Once adopted, there will be no changes enforced on vehicles currently in the taxi fleet. However, from 1 January 2026, such licences will only be renewed for vehicles less than 10 years old.*

*This proposal supports the Council's priorities on climate change and actions to improve air quality, as well as maintaining a high standard of vehicle fleet for our residents and visitors to the forest.*

*Members will be aware though, that this is a draft Taxi Licensing Policy, and it is currently out for public consultation until 15 April 2024. We are therefore seeking views from stakeholders, the taxi trade and members of the public. The Council is keen to hear about any potential impacts of the proposals during the 3-month consultation period. Comments received will be fully considered by Members at the General Purposes and Licensing Committee prior to the submission of a final version of a new policy.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question seeking to clarify if an eight year old vehicle would qualify if the policy was due to come into force in two years time, the Committee Chairman highlighted that under the proposals out for consultation, if a vehicle was ten years old when the policy came into force, then it would not qualify.*

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