

28 MARCH 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 28 March 2024.

- * Cllr Alan O'Sullivan (Chairman)
- * Cllr Barry Dunning (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Alan Alvey
- Jack Davies
- Jacqui England
- David Millar

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

- Jill Cleary
- Jeremy Heron

Councillors:

- Barry Rickman
- * Alex Wade
- * Christine Ward

Councillors:

- John Sleep

Officers Attending:

Alan Bethune, Rebecca Drummond, Ryan Stevens, Saqib Yasin and Andy Rogers.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs J Davies, England, Rickman and Millar.

47 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

49 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

50 NOTICE OF COUNCIL MOTIONS - WASTE AND RECYCLING CENTRES / LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

The Panel considered the motion presented to the Council on 26 February 2024 concerning Hampshire County Council (HCC) plans to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres, and Local Authority Finances, together with a proposed officer response.

The response was separated into two parts; (a) the response to the HCC Future Services Consultation, and (b) the letter to the Government on local authority finances.

Members' comments are captured below:

Household Waste Recycling Centres

A member reported that residents opposed closure of these sites and as an alternative preferred small charges for users of centres as a way to keep the sites open.

A member commented that the majority of people who visited tips took relatively small loads, mostly comprising garden waste, and it was suggested that people with bigger loads or with trailers be charged.

It was also commented that the volume of visits had reduced, so reducing the hours or days the sites were open might be more cost effective than charging.

It was felt Marchwood and Somerley residents would not want to have to go elsewhere and our residents should not have to be at the behest of another authority's waste and recycling centres

School Crossing Patrols – Members felt strongly that this raised road safety concerns for our youngest people, and wished to stress the value of this service, particularly around infant and junior schools.

Members also felt the response should state that the Council considers that any proposal for a reduction in this service should be supported by evidence showing that the criteria set out in the school crossing patrol service guidelines issued by Road Safety GB have been met.

Passenger Transport Members opposed this and suggested that representations be made in reference to Health and Wellbeing Residents and Corporate Strategies regarding cuts to the grants, and also impact on NFDC as a grant giver to CAB.

Highways Maintenance and Winter Maintenance – it was felt a stronger response was needed if only for the impact on Council vehicles. A member commented that many residents felt the state of roads was totally unacceptable and any further cuts would have a detrimental effect on the Highway.

Hampshire Culture Trust Grant – Members supported the Council's response. NFDC did well in supporting arts and culture. The sector had faced hard times since Covid, losing income and grants were less or lost entirely. Some grants were vital to some organisations' viability and had the organisations had worked very hard to recover ground after these difficulties.

The Panel supported the proposed response on Local Government Finance, and the Leader stated that she was happy to write to the Government in those terms.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That subject to the Section 151 Officer reviewing the Panel's views as set out above, the proposed corporate response to the HCC Future Services Consultation be supported.

- (b) That the proposed text recommended to the Leader of the Council in relation regarding the letter to the Government on local authority finances, be recommended to the Council.

51 CORPORATE PLAN 2024 - 28

The Panel received the final draft of the Corporate Plan following a public consultation exercise.

Generally, members felt the document was well presented, comprehensive and easy to read.

Officers reported some minor presentational adjustments to the document, and members suggested a number of minor textual amendments.

Some members expressed reservations on the emphasis placed on the Solent Freeport and reported doubts among local residents, chiefly regarding employment and business benefits, and environmental and traffic impacts.

It was also felt that the house building target to 2026 should continue to be held as a target to be adhered to. It was noted that a number of factors such as Covid, Ukraine, and site availability (coming forward via developers) had a detrimental effect on progress with the housing target.

A member queried whether the various performance measures relating to climate change had been amended, and officers undertook to clarify this with the member concerned.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that the final draft of the Corporate Plan 2024-2028 be approved.

52 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Panel received an update on progress with the Transformation Programme.

A copy of the slides is available in the agenda pack.

Members made a number of comments as follows:

- Ensuring less able residents in the use of ICT were not disenfranchised.
- The need for a timescale flowchart for the project. (This would be included in the Implementation Plan)
- More specific examples around customer transaction adjustments.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

53 CUSTOMER STRATEGY

The Panel received a presentation outlining the Customer Strategy. A copy of the slides is attached to the minutes.

The presentation explained the Strategy in the context of the Corporate Plan and the Transformation Programme, putting the customer at the heart of what the Council did.

Work had been undertaken analysing correspondence received as well as telephone calls to gain insights and ascertain the nature of customer contacts and their experience. Focus groups and surveys had also been undertaken.

Key elements were emerging from the analysis and a series of customer strategy themes, expected outcomes and principles had been established.

A member suggested that call filtering be used, directing customers to parish or county councils for their respective functions. The need for data sharing across services and accessibility outside office hours was also highlighted. It was also important that the Council's website worked on all devices in the same way.

A draft strategy was now being developed together with expected milestones and timelines. The Strategy would be submitted to the Panel and Cabinet for approval.

54 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION TASK & FINISH GROUP - ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2024

The Panel considered proposed arrangements for the operation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED:

That a Council Tax Schemes Task & Finish Group be formed, comprising 7 members, with the Terms of Reference as set out below:

“To consider and make recommendations to the Panel on the following:

Council Tax Support Scheme

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions Policy

Council Tax Premium for properties that are periodically occupied (“second homes”)

Council Tax premium for long term empty properties”

Provisional dates would be shared with members when asking for volunteers.

55 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES AND PERFORMANCE DASHBOARDS

The Panel received updates from the Portfolio holders on developments within their service areas and in relation to the performance dashboards.

Cllr Jill Cleary, Leader

Areas covered by the Portfolio holder were

- Attendance of the LGA Transformation Development Day
- Membership of Solent Freeport Finance Resources and Audit Committee
- Totton Hub and Food Bank visit
- New Forest Show preparations (50th birthday)

The Leader also gave updates on various performance data within her portfolio:

- Website optimisations – resource working on Intranet
- Customer Satisfaction – 2 yearly survey later this year
- HR Recruitment Pack upgrade – well received at HR Committee
- Vacancies filled first time – was set to improve, especially now Recruitment system had been updated.

In answer to a question, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged that there could be implications for the Freeport if there were a change of Government but these were not known. It was hoped the local area would see some benefits soon.

Reference was made to the closure of the Hythe Food Larder and it was noted that the Council was providing as much support as it could in the interests of local residents.

Cllr Jeremy Heron, Finance and Corporate

The portfolio holder referred to the higher interest rates and the prohibitive effect on commercial property investment.

He paid tribute to the Revenue and Benefits Team, which had issued to 83,000 council tax bills and would collect circa £160m in council taxes. They had also issued 7,000 Business Rates Bills with a view to collecting £77m in business rates. They had issued 8,000 tax support letters, awarding £9.9m in support. They had also issued 4,000 housing benefit letters, and £20m in support would be awarded.

The Portfolio holder also referred to the ICT Service and explained the extensive range of ICT Projects underway, introducing new systems and maintaining services.

It was acknowledged that the KPIs headed 'Increase in value of residential investment' should be reworded to convey the growth in the number properties held, rather than increasing the value of existing properties.

Officers confirmed that the June Panel meeting would include an annual update on commercial and residential property investment and would detail the situation regarding the Platinum Jubilee Development. The work programme also included an update regarding the Hardley Depot project.

56 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel discussed its work programme.

The Chairman proposed, and it was agreed, that in order to better balance agenda workloads and allow a better update to be given, the Freeports Update be moved from the June to September Panel meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved subject to the adjustment mentioned above.

CHAIRMAN

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Customer Strategy

March 2024

Background

- Corporate Plan

- People theme

- Put the customer at the heart of what we do
 - Investing in our people and services to meet customer needs

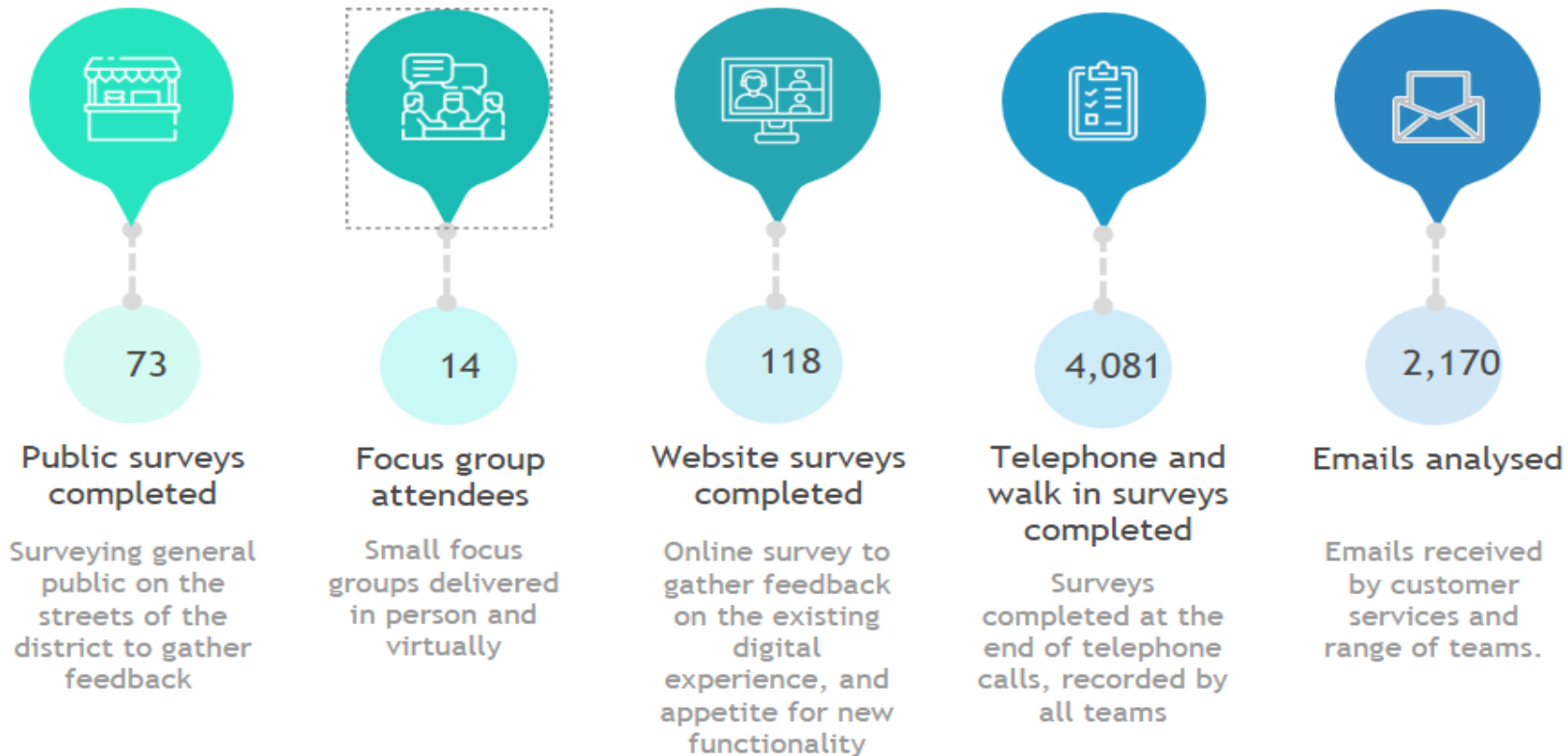
- Transformation

- 4 challenges – financial, modernising services, capacity and environment
 - One of the 4 key themes – Customer and Digital
 - 3 objectives:
 1. Our customers will be at the heart of our digital-by-design approach
 2. We will use data and insight to plan services, manage performance and direct our focus for transformation
 3. We will have the right systems, processes and devices to ensure work can be done in the right place, right time and the most efficient way

Journey so far – customer insight

- Ignite research – what did we do?

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Staff involvement

- Change Champions
- Customer Services
- Team briefings
- Service Managers

What did the insight tell us?

- The website survey showed that 84% agreed it was easy to find the service or information they were looking for
- In the telephone surveys we asked the question ‘What made you call today instead of using an online service?’ and of the 1300 people who answered the question, 47% told us they could not find, or do what they needed to online, causing them to call
- 9% of those who called told us they did not have access to the internet or tools
- 10% told us they weren’t comfortable using online services
- Customers don’t mind an automated response, but they want it to include a timeframe and to stick to the timeframe



Customer strategy themes

Outcomes

Understand

Experience

Access

Trust

Principles

We will put the customer at the heart of what we do

We will provide our customers with a consistent experience through all interactions with us

We will utilise technology to meet customer needs whilst maintaining existing channels

We will use data to shape and improve service delivery

Our promise

we will listen and learn

we will be clear with you

we will be open, honest and respectful

we will always take responsibility



----- Corporate Standards -----

Our approach to accessing services

Digital by
desire

Easy to access

Meet
customer
needs

Keep
customers
informed

Minimise
email and post

Digitise
payments

Customer Strategy

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- Developed a draft strategy
- Actions to achieve principles
- Work with ICT on digital priorities
- Agree timeline/milestones
- Staff consultation
- Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet Approval
- Comms and embed strategy

Any questions or feedback?