

11 JANUARY 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLACE AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 11 January 2024

* Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine (Chairman)
Cllr Alvin Reid (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Peter Armstrong
* Keith Craze
* Allan Glass
* Matthew Hartmann

Councillors:

* Stephanie Osborne
* Adam Parker
* Malcolm Wade

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Geoffrey Blunden

Councillors:

Derek Tipp

Also In Attendance:

Officers Attending:

James Carpenter, Tim Guymer, Roxanne King, Joe Tyler and James Smith

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Reid.

30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 and the Special Meetings held on 27 September 2023 and 22 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

32 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

33 CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE EMERGENCY UPDATE

The Climate and Sustainability Manager presented the report on the Climate Change and Nature Emergency update. The Panel were given a summary of the report and the main points were as follows:

- This latest report was an update, demonstrating the activity and efforts made across Council services and in partnership with external stakeholders, before the action plan would be published later in the year.
- A New Forest Community Energy group had been created.
- Software had been adopted to quantify carbon savings through the Council's buildings and tree stocks.
- Preparation and consultation of climate related planning documents had been undertaken.
- The future purchase of renewable energy for the corporate estate had been agreed.
- NFDC ranked comparably to its Hampshire counterparts in the UK Council Climate Scorecard assessment.
- Opportunities linked to and dependent upon the corporate plan, transformation programme and asset and maintenance strategies had been identified.
- There is now a need to move beyond foundation level projects already achieved by the Council toward systemic initiatives that will deliver significant improvements. How these initiatives will be resourced will be a key component of the delivery of the new strategy.
- The new reporting schedule will see the publication of the strategy, action plans and annual reports at two points during the year; April and October. This new schedule will simplify the reporting process and accommodate the data when it becomes available.
- Key spend on sustainability in 2023-2024 is on track for 100% utilisation in this financial year on the projects that are yet to be delivered.

Following the presentation, members of the Panel were able to ask questions and make comments on the report. These were as follows:

- Following a question on the NFDC's rating on Buildings and Heating comparable to other Hampshire Councils, the Panel were informed that the data used to inform the scorecard was area wide and did not just refer to NFDC buildings but the wider retrofit programme that NFDC have been supporting in Hampshire.
- The Climate and Sustainability Manager confirmed, following a comment on data and targets contained within the action plan, that the Council would be providing contemporary data that is bespoke to the NFDC area. It was explained that how the Council would collect this data and resource the subsequent actions that would be among the most pressing aspects of the plan.
- Members commented on waste management, in particular the approach to household recycling and food waste. It was noted that clear communications on recycling good practice would be useful to encourage positive behavioural change.
- A member commended the Council on its placing in the UK Council Climate scorecard for Hampshire 2023 and highlighted that all Councillors have a responsibility to engage with climate and sustainability initiatives and to communicate good practice to their constituents.

- One Panel member referred to the lower score achieved by NFDC in waste reduction and transport. It was heard by the Panel that the reduction of household waste, particularly food waste, would require localised behavioural change under a broader, national systemic change.
- It was heard that the Waste Disposal Strategy would be a milestone of changing processes to contribute to sustainability within the District.
- A member stated that communication, community and corporate were three elements that would be key to improving sustainability within the District and that these important elements would be linked within the corporate policy.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel:

- 1.1 That the Panel notes the climate action which has taken place to date.
- 1.2 That the Panel notes the scheduling of annual reports and action plans, in relation to the Council and the District's response to the declared Climate Change and Nature Emergency. To align with the new reporting schedule, the current action plan delivery timeframe will be extended to April 2024.

34 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

The Policy and Strategy Service Manager and the Senior Policy Planner presented the report on the Local Plan Review. The Panel were given a summary of the report and the main points were as follows:

- The Local Plan played an important role in shaping the local communities and would enable the Council to react to climate change and implement regeneration attempts around the District, as well as facilitating investment in the area.
- Reviews of Local Plans are required every 5 years by Government. Part 1 of the previous review began in 2020 shortly after the Covid pandemic began. Since this point, the Government have made significant changes to the planning system. Part 2 was yet to progress due to the events of the past few years and the significant changes in planning policy.
- One key concern was the Council's housing supply and how it had worsened since the 2020 Covid pandemic. The Council was currently unable to provide a 5-year provision of housing.
- There were three options for the next steps in the Local Plan Review. The recommended option was for a fresh, full review to be undertaken in order to allow the Council to consider the challenges and opportunities facing NFDC in line with climate change, the shrinking and aging population, the new initiatives being considered by the Council and the transport investment policy. This option also allows the Council to address the significant lack of housing land supply and respond in a meaningful way to the changes seen since the Covid pandemic.
- The full review would include the preparation of a District wide design code alongside a new local plan. The initial timetable proposes milestones and timeframes for when key activities and outcomes would be expected.
- A Summer 2025 consultation would enable the key-issues to be considered and responded to by the NFDC community for input into the new local plan.

- A cross-member working group would enable collaborative working on this matter and further community engagement would enable the appropriate consultation of stakeholders across the New Forest.
- On the financing of this review, there would be an initial cost to the Council which would be met through a combination of reserves for the Local Plan as well as funding through fees attached to planning applications. Additionally, £200,000 for the preparation of a Design Code would be met in the budgets for the forthcoming years. Despite the significant initial outlay, the full review would act as an investment tool for businesses and development in the area for the future.

Following the presentation, members of the Panel were able to ask questions and make comments on the report. These were as follows:

- A member asked whether there would be the ability to change some of the Council's existing planning policies. It was acknowledged how the existing policies had seen the Council face a self-perpetuating issue when it came to the supply of housing, and it was hoped that a positive change in the policies would enable the Council to better meet the needs of the District.
- Another member commented on the need to improve the housing supply and how the new local plan required detail on its policies to achieve more desirable planning applications being submitted to the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel provided comments to the Cabinet on the content on this report, and supported the intended Cabinet recommendations, as follows;

That the Cabinet recommends 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.

35 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability addressed the Panel. He gave the following update:

- The Portfolio Holder welcomed the Climate Change Update provided to the Panel and encouraged further debate on the matter along with the measurable data that would be analysed in the future.
- On the Garden Waste rollout, members heard that 19,000 requests for the Garden Waste service had been submitted. 7000 Garden Waste bins had already been rolled out to households across the District. The service is set to start in April 2024 and to support this start date electric bin lifts had been installed to vehicles to facilitate the collections from April.
- A communications project had been started to remind people to dispose of electrical items correctly following some electrical fires occurring in collection vehicles.
- Initial feedback on car park clocks shows that the short and long stay car park clocks are continuing to sell with pace, with demand remaining consistent and showing value for regular parkers.
- Recent storm weather had affected the coastline with land slips occurring in Milford and Hordle where some beach huts had been lost with others being at risk. The Portfolio Holder placed on record his thanks to all staff who had worked over the Christmas period and through the storms to provide services to residents.

Following the update, members of the Panel were able to ask questions and make comments. These were as follows:

- On parking clocks, full data on selling rates compared to last year were not yet available but the indication was that some locations had asked for additional clocks to be supplied to meet demand. Further data would be provided later in the year.
- On the performance dashboards, the Panel heard that the new dashboards, following implementation of the Council's new Corporate Plan, would reflect the quarterly performance in line with the corporate priorities.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy gave the following update:

- The Local Plan Review was a major piece of work that would see benefit across the District, enabling the Council to take essential control of the planning sites and prevent inappropriate applications and developments occurring. There would also be plans to develop the Freeport and to upgrade relevant infrastructure through the Local Plan.
- On economy, new initiatives were being implemented by the Council and the Portfolio Holder was pleased to report the return of the mystery shopper scheme which provides feedback to owners of businesses in the District.
- The Starter Business Support programme was also about to start where advice would be given to newly formed businesses for self-employed people in the District. This programme would support new businesses and help them develop with Council guidance.

- The Rural England Prosperity Fund was still open for bids, including capital expenditure within the rural fund area. This would be open to March and left over funds would be reallocated to the community fund.

Following the Portfolio Holder's update, the Panel were able to ask questions and make comments, which included the following:

- On the Mystery Shopper scheme, a member requested further information on the number of businesses that engage with this. Further information was requested on the New Starter Business Support scheme and whether it was provided via a third party. The Portfolio Holder stated he would respond to the member with further information.
- On performance dashboards, further information was requested on certain areas of performance. The Panel were reminded that the dashboards would soon be reviewed so as to relate to contemporary information and align with the new corporate priorities.

36 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN