

8 JULY 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 8 July 2024

- * Cllr David Hawkins (Chairman)
- * Cllr John Sleep (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
- * Neville Penman
- * Dan Poole
- * Caroline Rackham
- * Alvin Reid
- * Joe Reilly
- * Janet Richards
- * Barry Rickman
- * Steve Rippon-Swaine
- Michael Thierry
- * Derek Tipp
- Neil Tungate
- * Alex Wade
- * Malcolm Wade
- * Christine Ward
- * Phil Woods
- * Richard Young

*Present

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje, James Smith, Karen Wardle and Matt Wisdom

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Hartmann, Heron, Mballa, Millar, Millington, Murray, Parker, Thierry and Tungate.

12 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Annual meeting held on 13 May 2024, be confirmed.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Cllr Haywood declared, for transparency purposes, in relation agenda item 5, that he was the Chairman of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Steering Group. He concluded that there were no issues under common law that prevented him from remaining in the meeting to speak and vote.

14 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**Charity Announcement**

The Chairman was very pleased to announce that his chosen charity for the year would be the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance. Through the support of donations, the charity brings exceptional critical care to the people of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Since their first life-saving flight in July 2007, they had used several helicopter models, with the current model capable of being anywhere across Hampshire within 15 minutes.

D Day 80

The Chairman reported he was honoured to raise the D Day 80 Flag at Appletree Court on 6 June, accompanied by the Leader of the Council, Vice-Chairman, the Armed Forces Champion and political group representatives. Local military representatives and NFDC staff veterans were also in attendance. The occasion gave time to pause and remember that we must never forget the selfless sacrifice and courage of the heroes who fought against all odds to liberate Europe 80 years ago, to secure the freedom we all enjoy today.

With the support of the Vice-Chairman, the Chairman was also able to represent the Council at D Day 80 events in Christchurch, Bransgore, Basingstoke and Exbury. In particular, he attended the unveiling ceremony for a collaborative sculpture in commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of D-Day in Exbury. This was honouring the Women's Royal Navy Service and mothers, daughters and families who were left on the shores bidding 'Hail and Farewell' to their loved ones. This ceremony also included the Royal Navy 'Tossing the Oars' salute and Royal Air Force fly past.

Armed Forces Day

The Chairman reported that alongside the Vice-Chairman and Armed Forces Champion, he raised the Armed Forces Day flag on 24 June, in recognition of the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community from the current serving personnel to Service families, veterans and cadets. He gave his thanks to the Vice-Chairman who also attended the Fawley Armed Forces day at Gang Warily Recreation and Community Centre.

Further Engagements

The Chairman also attended a range of Annual Mayor Making events across Basingstoke, Winchester, Southampton and Portsmouth in May and June.

He thoroughly enjoyed attending Ashley Junior School on 21 May to receive a presentation from year 6 children on recycling, which was extremely informative and interesting.

Thanks was given to the Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Reid who had laid a wreath on behalf of NFDC at the New Forest Airfields Memorial, Bransgore, recognising US Memorial Day.

The Chairman attended the Duke of Edinburgh Gold award presentations at the Great Hall in Winchester and the Civic Service in Christchurch.

Finally, the Chairman gave his thanks to the Vice-Chairman who had attended the Launch Event for the Solent Mind Strategy on 20 June, which facilitated discussions with volunteers and their men's shed section, and for attending the Annual Review and AGM of the Hampshire Scouts on 30 June.

15 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader made the following announcements:

Election

The Leader gave her sincere and personal thanks to all staff who helped out at the election, this included staff who prepared over 25,000 postal votes, those working in a polling station, working through the night at the count, or providing cover so Council services could continue as usual; thank you to everyone, it was a very professionally run event.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Leader reported that the District Council had just released the tenant satisfaction measure results. These related to perception surveys undertaken in late summer 2023 and January this year, as well as performance data collected over the 2023/24 financial year. She was delighted with how satisfied council tenants felt about the service. Tenants had scored the District Council as a housing landlord with an overall satisfaction rating of 81%. Further and more detailed information would be presented to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny panel later in the month.

New Forest Show

The Leader highlighted that the New Forest Show would be taking place at the end of July and into August. The District Council's theme this year would showcase the new Corporate Plan and celebrate 50 years of New Forest District Council. The latest awareness campaign to combat littering, involving a sculpture made of our litter, would also be in situ at the show before going on tour of the District, as part of the 'look out for our new forest' campaign.

Changing Places

The Leader reported that the two new changing places toilets were open and fully operational in Brockenhurst and Ringwood, providing much needed facilities for those in the community who require extra space and support when needing to use public convenience facilities.

St Georges Hall, Calshot

Finally, the Leader announced that work had commenced on St Georges Hall in Calshot. This work would significantly rejuvenate the facility for the good of Calshot residents, the broader community and users of the Calshot cemetery.

16 RINGWOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN - REFERENDUM

Cllr Tipp introduced the report and moved the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr Haywood declared, for transparency purposes, that he was the Chairman of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. He concluded that there were no issues under common law that prevented him from remaining in the meeting to speak and vote.

A number of councillors spoke in support of Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan, recognising the hard work which had been put into it, particularly as minimal changes had been recommended by the examiner. It was highlighted that the residents of Ringwood had recognised the benefits of the plan, by voting to supporting it. The high turnout rate in the referendum was also acknowledged.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the outcome of the Referendum of 4 July 2024 be noted; and
- ii) That the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan be 'made' (adopted) as part of the Development Plan for New Forest District (Outside the National Park)

17 QUESTIONS

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

- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr S Davies, on Right to Buy.
- From Cllr M Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on Dibden Golf Club.
- From Cllr Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Finance, Cllr Heron, on the local government settlement.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on Tree Works and SLAs with Town/Parishes.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on 50 years of NFDC, elections and democracy.

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

18 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes.

CHAIRMAN

FULL COUNCIL – 8 JULY 2024 – QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Steve Davies

The Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment to allow local authorities to opt out of right to buy was a popular policy with local people. Will the Portfolio Holder write to the new Secretary of State and ask for right to buy to be stopped in the New Forest?

Answer:

As my fellow members will know this administration wholeheartedly supports creating a variety of opportunities for those of our residents who aspire to own their own homes, but need a small helping hand to do so.

Our housing development programme has so far delivered 7 homes for Shared Ownership, with 8 more in the pipeline, whilst up to 30 First Homes are in the approved development pipeline across our Strategic Sites. The Right to Buy has supported 69 New Forest residents in the last 3 and a half years, whilst the capital receipts from these sales, plus grant funding, has been re-invested by the Council to 62 social housing properties of the size, and in the areas, our applicants need them most.

This year we also plan to invest up to £18 million in delivering additional affordable housing and the last Corporate Plan 2024-28 continues this administration's significant commitment to developing more affordable housing, in all its forms across the district.

In my opinion, if a tenant can take on the commitment to own their own their own home. It is a fundamental belief they should be able to succeed. Therefore, the simple answer, is no.

Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding the loss of housing stock in the district through Right to Buy, and the current number of homes owned by the District Council, the Portfolio Holder reported that there were just over 5,200 with development continuing over the next three years. He reported that he would find out the exact number and pass this information on.

Question 2

From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole

Dibden Golf Club is celebrating its 50-year anniversary this year. Why is New Forest District Council not celebrating the opening of this facility, which it provided nor working with the club and members to help them celebrate this event?

Answer:

As Cllr Wade is aware, the District Council in its entirety is celebrating its 50th Birthday this year, and this will be central to our theme for the upcoming New Forest Show. Whilst it is impossible for us to hold an individual recognition event for every asset or facility in the celebrations, I am very pleased to let the councillor know I am attending the golf centre on Friday morning this week to visit and try out the new golf simulator facility very recently

installed, and opened as a result of the successful partnership we have with MyTime Active. I would of course welcome the opportunity to attend a further celebration if invited by the club.

Note – in response to a supplementary question suggesting the Portfolio Holder engage with club members to help them celebrate, the Portfolio Holder reported that he would be happy to have a conversation with the golf club when he attended on Friday, about any celebrations they might wish to have.

Question 3

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

With the new Government firmly in place, can the Portfolio Holder indicate whether work has been undertaken by officers to provide enough material to maximise the local government settlement with this authority given the manifesto commitments?

Answer:

The new government has been firmly in place for nearly half a week, so I guess it is a very reasonable question to ask.

The Leader very recently sent a letter to Michael Gove, the then Minister for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities outlining a request for a multi-year settlement, as well as highlighting our concerns at the size and severity of savings being required by the County Council. It was confirmed in the reply, and I quote;

‘Your letter raises the importance of multi-year certainty, which this Government recognises. Spending decisions beyond 2024/25 are a matter for the next spending review. It is the Government’s intention to return to multi-year settlements in the next parliament when circumstances allow’.

Regardless of whether this comes into effect from next year or not, this administration will then do what it always does. We will prioritise our spend according to the needs of our residents, and take the bold decisions needed to protect our vital frontline services, and protect the long-term financial health of this authority.

Note – in the absence of Cllr Heron, this question was dealt with in writing.

Question 4

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Is it not unreasonable for Parish and Town Councils to suddenly have to find an extra approx. £30k for tree works provision, because NFDC deems it reasonable to raise its tree contracting prices significantly, especially following councils setting their budget for FY24/25 in January at the explicit request of NFDC?

Answer:

Thank you for your question. We have been engaging with Parish and Town Councils since July last year on the fact that we were retendering our tree works contract, alongside Test

Valley District Council. It was clear from all of those who engaged positively in that discussion, that inflationary pressures would likely mean an increase in cost of this work.

The District Council has incurred the same inflationary pressure and is having to manage its budgets and priorities accordingly. Town and Parish Councils are not obliged to use the contractors we have procured, it is merely an option that is available to them to help them benefit from the economies of scale. Equally there was the option, to procure their own alternative contracted solution.

The suggestion that it is somehow the District Council that has directly passed on cost to Towns and Parishes is factually incorrect, and I would be happy for our senior officer team to bring Cllr Wade up to date on the facts, on the same basis upon which they have already been shared with the Chair and Clerk of the Parish Council to which I suspect he refers.

Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding encouraging partnership working between the District Council and Towns and Parishes and seeking assurance that the contract was not to the benefit of the District Council only, the Portfolio Holder felt there had been a clear demonstration of joint working with the Town and Parish Councils in relation to the contract, where the District Council had been able to offer the lowest price possible, due to economies of scale.

Second Questions

Question 5

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary

As NFDC celebrates its 50th year, and we are off the back of a General election where there seemed to be a lot of apathy and frustration, what efforts are being made to engage New Forest's Residents, to learn about what NFDC Does and become involved in the democratic process? And do you agree, that despite it not being unique to the New Forest, the voter turnout for local elections suggests there is more we can do?

Answer:

Members will be aware that as part of this Council's 50 year milestone, we have brought together 50 facts, using each of the numbers one to fifty, to illustrate the breadth of activity we are involved in. A really creative and informative piece of work to engage and inform our residents in what this Council does. On the NFDC website, many of the facts within the list are accompanied by a link to find out more, and signpost residents to services and support.

A 50 years of NFDC video, alongside an audio clip narrated by me, as Leader, gives a snapshot of some of those important aspects of local life we are involved in, and which could be of real benefit to our residents. The 50 list will also feature at our stand at this year's New Forest Show.

Members may also be aware that to mark our 50 years, a local sculptor is carving a commemorative design into the cedar tree stump at Appletree Court, a tree which was felled in 2023 due to safety concerns with the root structure. The design will be a visual representation of our work to support our district, both over the last 50 years and into the future. The remaining logs are also being carved into decorative seating for staff and visitors.

Becoming involved in the democratic process and encouraging local people to vote is something we can all play our part in promoting. The Council does promote campaigns such as the “become a councillor” and “be a councillor” campaigns run by the National Association of Local Councils, and the Local Government Association, respectively. Our key communications channels, including social media, our residents emails, and work with local media outlets, also play an important part in encouraging people to vote with informative and engaging content throughout the period leading up to an election.

Note - in response to a supplementary question regarding engagement with local schools and colleges to encourage involvement in the democratic process, the Leader reported she would look into this and get back to Cllr Wade directly.