

16 SEPTEMBER 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 16 September 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
* 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
* David Millar

Councillors:

* 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
Vacancy

*Present

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Tanya Coulter, James Carpenter, Richard Knott, Chris Noble, Daniel Reynafarje, Paul Whittles and Matt Wisdom.

Remembering Cllr Keith Craze

The Chairman expressed his deep sadness following the recent passing of Cllr Keith Craze, who served the District with dedication and distinction. He was a committed public servant, having represented the Barton ward from 2019-2023 and the Barton and Becton ward from 2023-2024.

Keith held a number of important positions in his time as a District Councillor, including most recently as Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee. Keith brought his 40 years of experience in Human Resources to the HR Committee, adding invaluable insight to the Council's work as a local employer. He also served as Chairman of the Community, Partnerships and Wellbeing Panel prior to the Council's most recent committee structure, as a dedicated member of a number of

working groups, and he also represented the Council on a number of Outside Bodies, including work with Wessex Water, and Hampshire Road Safety.

The Chairman recognised Keith's service to New Milton Town Council, having held the distinguished office of Town Mayor and Chairman.

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman placed on record his thanks for Cllr Craze's service, and expressed his sincere condolences to Keith's family and friends.

A number of Members spoke to add their personal tributes in remembering Cllr Keith Craze.

With the NFDC flag at half mast, the Council stood in silent tribute, as it remembered Keith and his service to the Council, and the New Forest District.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Alvey, Blunden, Clark, Glass, Linford, Murray, Rippon-Swaine and M Wade.

19 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024, be confirmed.

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Emergency Services Day

The Chairman referred to the Council flying the Emergency Services Day Flag on Monday 9 September, in recognition of the heroic men and women of the NHS and emergency services. Each year, the occasion presents the Council with the opportunity to promote the work of the emergency services, educate the public about basic lifesaving skills, and promote the many career and volunteering opportunities available that are vital to keeping Britain safe.

Engagements

The Chairman reported on the following recent engagements:-

10 July

Laid a wreath on behalf of the District at the Annual Commemoration Indian Obelisk, in New Milton.

11 July

Attended the Brockenhurst College Gala Awards, sponsored by NFDC.

26 July

Alongside the Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Alvin Reid, attended the Blue Jumper Lunch at the McMullen Barracks in Marchwood, invited by the Commanding Officer of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment.

July

Alongside the Vice-Chairman, attended a number of civic events hosted by fellow Hampshire Authorities, including East Hampshire and Basingstoke and Deane.

30 August – 1 September

At the New Forest Show this year, the Chairman was delighted to mark the Council's 50th anniversary year at its stand, alongside the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and many of the Council's partners across the District. The event provided a platform to launch the Council's new corporate plan, for people, place and prosperity.

12 September

Attended the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance tour and talk about the charity. The Chairman highlighted this as extremely interesting and informative, particularly as his chosen charity for the year.

22 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

23 REPORT OF CABINET - 7 AUGUST 2024**PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

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

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**Item 4 – Annual Performance and Provisional Budget Outturn 2023/24**

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

RESOLVED:

That Council approve the establishment of a new Corporate Priorities Reserve, with an initial contribution of £1.5 million in 2023/24 and note the transfer of £262,000 in 2023/24 to enhance the Treasury Management Reserve.

Item 5 – Transformation Business Case – Customer and Digital Services (Including Organisational Design) and Appletree Court

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

One Member suggested that the general trend of staff working from home could be considered the biggest change the Council had ever seen, with it starting before the pandemic and accelerating through this period. The Member considered that whilst there were advantages of this, some risks including isolation, and the impact on collaboration and team ethic needed to be very carefully considered. It was requested that this be given very close attention, particularly if more radical change such as office closures took place. In connection with hybrid working, a further Member highlighted the importance of being able to offer this as an employee benefit, in a challenging recruitment space. This aided the Council's work as an employer of choice, and to retain talented staff, if the right balance could be found.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate agreed that the management of the risk of staff isolation was crucial. Senior officers monitored this closely. This was assisted by a hybrid balance of three days in the office, with two working from home. The environmental benefits of reducing five days worth of staff commuting was also noted. The Portfolio Holder took the opportunity to remind Members that there were no plans to close Appletree Court, and committed to maintaining a council presence across the District.

One Member spoke specifically on the potential future of Lymington Town Hall and the impact that this might have not only on NFDC residents, but to those partner organisations using the facilities at the site.

The Leader responded to the debate, highlighting the support for the balance of hybrid working expressed through the recent staff survey results. Team days were also highlighted which involved all staff from a particular service area attending to collaborate with colleagues. Hybrid working was seen as an important part of the Council being able to strive towards and maintain its position as an employer of choice.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve:-

1. the allocation of £2.709m on an invest-to-save basis to deliver the necessary technology and organisational changes to deliver the preferred future organisational design option; and
2. the allocation of up to £1.75m for improvements to the East wing of ATC on an invest-to-save basis, to facilitate the third party letting of the south wing and the generation of c£300,000 per annum in income.

Item 6 – Introduction of a Performance Management Framework / Consideration of a relate Motion Referred by Council

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

One Member welcomed the increased transparency that would be achieved through the new performance management framework, specifically in monitoring climate measures. However, a number of partners that measured their overall carbon footprint were cited, despite the Council not measuring this total figure presently, recognising some of the challenges in defining this. The Member welcomed the opportunity through the Task and Finish Group to consider the options for monitoring emissions, how this is defined, and subsequently to set meaningful net zero targets based on this data.

A number of other Members endorsed the comments above, and wished to ensure that the Task and Finish Group pursued a meaningful set of objectives, including the opportunity to learn from other councils and partners on their approach to the climate and nature emergency.

In respect of the Performance Management Framework itself, a Member highlighted that additional performance measures had been suggested across number of areas that did not feature in the final version for a variety of reasons. It was hoped that these issues would be captured through other appropriate reporting mechanisms, even if not directly through the framework. Performance Management of staff and the undertaking of regular one to one conversations was also raised.

One Member suggested that ambitious targets were not necessarily a bad thing, with performance being driven towards these, falling short could still result in very high performing services. He encouraged bolder, more radical target setting and appropriate risk taking in this context.

The Leader responded to the debate, and welcomed the focus to the Task and Finish Group's proposed programme of work. She specifically addressed the concerns on staff performance management and managers undertaking one to one conversations, highlighting these were taking place and reports in this area continued to show signs of ongoing improvement.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that:-

1. The Leader's foreword to the Corporate Plan states that 'As a well-established community leader, the Council has long recognised the strong heritage and a world-class environment we operate within, and work to protect and enhance. Tackling climate and environmental challenges is key to ensure that the special nature of the New Forest can be enjoyed by future generations.'
2. Two of the four values of this Council are Ambition (We will be ambitious for our people and our place, embracing innovation and best practice) and Fairness (We will act fairly, honestly, and openly in all that we do).
3. The first priority of this Council's Future New Forest transformation programme is "Putting our customers at the heart of what we do".
4. This Council voted in October 2021 to declare a 'Climate Change and Nature Emergency'.

5. This Council's Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 does not include measurable targets and a mechanism to report progress against such targets to our residents.
6. High performing organisations relish being measured as it allows them to demonstrate their outstanding performance.
7. That in the draft consultation version of the Corporate Plan, a measurement of "Overall emissions from council activity (Kg of CO2)" was included.

This Council resolves that:-

1. In delivering our Corporate Plan 2024-2028, this Council stated that the plan would be underpinned by a suitable and proportionate Performance Management Framework that details the reporting regime for progress monitoring. This is now developed alongside a formal published set of KPIs, with targets (Appendix 2, 2024-2028 List of KPIs). Clear KPI definitions have been agreed with accountable officers (Appendix 3, NFDC handbook of definitions).
2. The mechanisms for reporting against the targets, and publishing progress on a minimum of an annual basis, is set out in the Performance Management Framework and accompanying list of KPIs.
3. With respect to Place Priority 2 "Protecting our climate, coast, and natural world", and the consideration of the measure, "Overall emissions from council activity (Kg of CO2)", this is not supported and the following is resolved:-
 - (a) The overall emissions resulting from council activity will continue to be reported through the Climate Change and Nature Emergency (CC&NE) Annual Report. This report details the implementation and governance of activities resulting from the CC&NE Strategy and Action Plan and outlines the scope of emissions targets, performance measures and monitoring arrangements.
 - (b) The resourcing implications of any additional targets and measures are not currently known or allocated.
 - (c) Cabinet recognise the value in more fully understanding this area and proposed to establish a Task and Finish group for 12 months, to consider this measure within the context of the Council's Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plans. This will include consideration of adopted targets measures, scope, resource implications and prioritisation.
 - (d) Should the CC&NE Task and Finish group make recommendations for additional Climate Change and a Nature Emergency targets or measures to be adopted, these should reside within the CC&NE Action Plan as opposed to the Corporate Plan list of KPIs.

24 REPORT OF CABINET - 4 SEPTEMBER 2024**PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 4 September 2024.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**Item 2 – Customer Strategy**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

The good work culminating in a 'Customer Promise', developed through the Change Champions Group was recognised by Members.

Members debated some of the improvement targets included within the strategy, most notably call transfers. It was suggested that this could be more ambitious moving forwards.

One Member highlighted the interdependencies with the Council's ICT Strategy, and the access across the District to reliable broadband. Ultimately, a consistent experience should be the ambition across different communication channels with the Council. Members welcomed the commitment to continue to offer face to face support for those that needed it.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate responded to the debate. He highlighted that targets needed to be proportionate when a number of ICT systems and infrastructure was changing alongside service redesign. It was hoped that these could become more ambitious in the future. With regard to the number of responses to consultations, it was suggested that when change was not popular, response rates were high, but it was less likely for respondents to write to the Council welcoming change that was generally well received.

RESOLVED:

That the Customer Strategy be approved.

Item 3 – Christchurch Bay & Harbour Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, the Leader introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

One Member welcomed the strategy and highlighted the need for a similar approach to the coastal area of Totton and the Waterside. It was noted that the Environment Agency was responsible for large sections of this coastline and further information on timescales for the development of a strategy were expected soon.

In response to some concerns about the funding of such an ambitious strategy, it was highlighted that with a comprehensive evidence base behind the strategy, funding opportunities were more readily available to the Council and partners, with

a strong position to pursue specific project bids. The work of the District Council's officers to get the documents to this stage was commended. A contrary view was expressed that given the ratio of funded to unfunded bids in this area, and with funding opportunities generally, the expectations upon the Council to commit significant resources including officer time to produce lengthy strategies, was not desirable.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve:-

1. The recommended leading options identified in the Christchurch Bay & Harbour Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for the New Forest 44 District Council area, subject to securing the necessary funding contributions.
2. That in approving and adopting the strategy, it commits to developing a Funding Strategy that will seek to identify and aim to secure the necessary funding contributions to enable the national or local leading options to be implemented via future capital schemes and maintenance of existing/new schemes, noting that the exact amount of contributions will need to be confirmed as schemes are developed.

Note – Cllr Harrison requested that his abstention from the resolution above, be recorded.

Item 4 – Strategic Risk Register

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

In response to one Member's specific questions on some of the risks outside of tolerance levels and the mitigation measures to reduce risk, the Leader committed to supplying the relevant information to the Member outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategic Risk Register, be adopted.

25 ALLOCATION OF SEATS AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND PANELS

The Leader moved the recommendations, proposing the allocation of seats to the political groups as identified in the report, with the individual nominees circulated at Appendix 1. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

One Member highlighted a correction in the report to identify the non-aligned Member as 'Labour and Cooperative'.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:-

1. Having considered the allocation of seats to committees and panels in accordance with the principles set out in the report, agrees to maintain the Council's current position set out in the table at paragraph 13 of the report;
2. Appoints councillors to individual committees and panels, as identified in Appendix 1, for the remainder of the four year period ending May 2027; and
3. Notes that a further review of the allocation of seats will be undertaken following the by-election for the Barton and Becton ward.

26 QUESTIONS

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

- From Cllr Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Fawley Waterside.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Section 106 monies.
- From Cllr Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron, on unpaid Council tax bills.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on flood and erosion plans for the East of the District.
- From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on planning reforms.
- From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on phosphate mitigation and affordable housing.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on Community Wardens.
- From Cllr Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron, on changes to local government settlements and funding formulas.

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

27 MEETING DATES 2025/2026**RESOLVED:**

That the following meeting dates for the 2025/26 municipal year, be agreed (Mondays, 6.30 pm):-

2025

- 12 May AGM (already agreed)
- 14 July
- 15 September
- 13 October
- 15 December

2026

- 23 February
- 13 April
- 18 May AGM

CHAIRMAN

Full Council – 16 September 2024 – Questions Under Standing Order 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

Can the Portfolio Holder advise the Council on the current state of play regarding the Fawley Waterside development, and provide an update we can share with our Residents who have been concerned by recent developments?

Reply:

As officers explained at the all member briefing on planning, on 3rd September, where topic of the Fawley Scheme was discussed, the planning application for the scheme was withdrawn in June, and the documented reasons for that related to development viability have been well publicised.

Only last week, senior officers from the Place, Operations and Sustainability Directorate met with the investor team, who remain committed to bringing forward the redevelopment of that site. What form that development will take, and over what timescale is to be determined, and will need to go through the planning process.

The investors are aware that the site has a local plan allocation for housing and commercial use, and that there is currently a review of the council local plan. In the meantime, the land remains an allocated brownfield site with potential for development.

Both the Council and the investors confirmed their desire to maintain a positive dialogue around the site, given its development designation and freeport status.

Note – this question was dealt within in writing in the absence of Cllr Clark.

Question 2

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

How much section 106 money is currently being held by NFDC? How much of those funds are time limited and, within the last year, have any monies been handed back to developers as time ran out for it to be spent? In addition, can the Portfolio Holder advise the Council from which developments the funds are currently being held and how much?

Reply:

The Council publishes an annual statement on its website called the 'Infrastructure Funding Statement'. This provides information on the amount of section 106 monies collected, spent and retained and information on the source and amount retained of individual S106 funds. The most recent version covers the financial year 2022-23.

Officers are currently preparing the 2023-24 version and expect to publish this within the next few weeks. As soon as it is available, all Members will be informed of this.

I can confirm that no S106 monies have been returned to developers and none of it is time limited.

A link to the published statement can be found here: ([Infrastructure Funding Statement - New Forest District Council](#)).

Question 3

From Cllr David Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Jeremy Heron

What level of debt remains from unpaid Council Tax bills? How many individuals are in default for over three months and six months and has this Council any outstanding legal actions against householders for unpaid bills?

Reply:

For all years prior to 1 April 2024, we currently have £4.3m in arrears for unpaid Council Tax which we continue to pursue to maximise collection. Not all of this Council Tax arrears relates to that owed to NFDC, but is accounted by us in our role as collection authority.

It is regular practice within the Tax and Benefits department to issue reminder notices, summons and liability orders in accordance with legislation to those that fall behind with their payments. We currently have 5,103 active liability orders with outstanding council tax due and we will work with these customers to pay the council tax outstanding.

Whenever anyone is unable to pay their council tax we always encourage them to contact us to discuss their circumstances so we can agree a way forward.

If any residents do have issues, we need to talk to them so please encourage your residents to contact our tax and benefits department.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the level of debt, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the Council's collection rate as being one of the best in the country at over 98%. He also reiterated how the NFDC figure within the overall total was a small proportion, in view of the Council's role as collection authority for all council tax (County Council, PCC, Fire and Rescue, Town and Parish).

Question 4

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

I understand that moves are taking place to encourage the Environment Agency to develop a flood and erosion plan for the East of the District. This is welcome news for those in Totton and Waterside who already experience flooding. However, having been told previously this would take 8-10 years (more than the timeline the Environment Agency stated previously). What can you report that this Council is doing in the meantime to show Totton and Waterside residents that it is taking this 40 year issue seriously?

Reply:

The responsibility for the delivery of a Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for the eastern side of the district lies with the Environment Agency (EA), as the prime risk is through tidal flooding.

At our request, an officer of the Environment Agency will be attending the Place & Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the new year to outline any proposals for the future development of a FCERM Strategy for the Waterside area.

It should be noted however, that there is no statutory duty for NFDC or the EA to deliver flood and coast protection measures, nor is there any guaranteed funding to deliver any such measures.

NFDC will continue to engage with the EA to consider a strategy that may follow on from the completion of the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy, late 2026.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the options to help residents on the waterside who were experiencing flooding, the Leader would ask the Portfolio Holder to write to Cllr Rackham on his return.

Question 5

From Cllr David Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

With the Government's proposed planning reforms, does the Portfolio Holder agree that Members and Residents need to feel they are being listened to and not have planning decisions made for them by those without an understanding of our District? And will he make this point in the Council's response to the proposals?

Reply:

The Council's draft response to the consultation on proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework has been the subject of an all Member briefing on 3 September, before subsequently being considered in detail by Members of the Local Plan Members Working Group on 9 September and scrutinised at the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 12 September.

I am very grateful for the input of those Members able to feed into this process and I consider that our draft response, due by 24 September, has incorporated the concerns and suggestions of Members very well, and I thank Tim Guymer and his officer team for their hard work for producing such a detailed response in such a short space of time.

Alongside our response to the questions posed, I intend to prepare a letter to the Secretary of State seeking clarity on a number of wider related matters, including the Government's commitment to infrastructure investment in the New Forest, and whether the proposed planning reforms do enough to recognise the unique attributes and opportunities across the District, in areas such as economic growth and supporting and increasing natural capital.

Question 6

From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

With the need for developers to purchase credits to mitigate phosphates at a ridiculous cost (For example, the Land off, Moortown Lane, Ringwood (Application 21/11723) costed at circa 5 million for 443 houses). What is the Council doing to find better and more economical solutions that enable developers to spend less and therefore deliver more affordable housing?

Reply:

At present there is only one provider of credits for the Avon catchment (a decommissioned fish farm at Bicton, near Fordingbridge).

Currently, the Council is undertaking joint work for the Avon catchment with the Avon Working Group (this includes other authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, and Wessex Water). The Avon catchment is now in successful receipt of government funding (£9.8m) to deliver mitigation schemes.

A number of mitigation projects are being worked up to look to introduce new schemes to the open market, additional to the existing one at Bicton. It is anticipated that as further credit schemes are brought forward this will introduce competition into the market and hopefully lower costs.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the timeframes involved, the Portfolio Holder confirmed this was currently being looked at.

Question 7

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

The Hants and IOW PCC recently announced £750k worth of funding for Community Wardens to assist in challenging a spike in ASB over the summer period, shared between local areas within the County and on the IOW. Can I ask why NFDC were one of the few areas not granted any portion of the allocated funds? And, did we actually engage with this initiative, and bid for any funding for this worthwhile project?

Reply:

In March of this year, the Council's Community Safety Team attended a briefing held by the OPCC where the eligibility criteria for accessing the funds were outlined. The eligibility criteria was defined by the Home Office as to what constituted an area hotspot, evidenced by Police using the Scanning Analysis Response Assessment or (SARA model for short). 20 locations across Hampshire were identified as eligible due to the high level of crime and ASB recorded, of which I am pleased to advise none were in the New Forest.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on pursuing possible funding, the Portfolio Holder highlighted £35,000 had been secured for community projects, which included:-

- NFDC District wide Weapons Prevention programme – £10,000.*
- Joint bid with Fawley Parish Council and NFDC, supported by Police and HIOWFRS (Fire Service) to deliver Drug and Alcohol awareness training district wide, and localised youth work on the waterside – £7,400.*
- Community and Social Housing bid of £17,100 for localised ASB issues to deliver targeted outreach work, Tidy Neighbourhood project, CCTV and specialist parenting support.*

Second Questions

Question 8

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

As councillors will have recently seen in the broadsheet newspapers, some movement is due on the old relative needs formula that was abandoned in 2013 towards Government local funding settlements. What contingencies therefore is the Council preparing if any, in anticipation of potential Government-led redistribution of funds, especially given the increasing likelihood that wealthier local authorities like ours may face reductions in funding to support more deprived areas elsewhere in the country. Moreover, what specific measures are being considered to maintain key public services, manage financial pressures and ensure long-term resilience in the face of such reforms?

Reply:

The Medium Term Financial Plan assumes that a fair funding review will take effect from 2027/28, and so everything we are doing in terms of making sensible decisions on things like benchmarking and adjusting our

Fees and Charges is gearing up for long term financial sustainability, on the basis that further funding reductions over time are likely. The Council also has a Budget Equalisation reserve, which is there to provide short-term financial assistance if any one particular finance settlement is more drastic in terms of funding reductions than our forecasts.

Interestingly this being a reserve that would have been spent multiple times over had the liberal democrat alternative budget been agreed for the last few years, removing the council's ultimate contingency for the event your question eludes to. Cllr Clark I'm sure will also have noted the investment that the administration proposes to make in council transformation on a spend-to-save basis over the next 3 years, creating more efficient and effective services for our residents, and maximising the potential from our assets, such as Appletree Court, through new and additional income generation.

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

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