

9 DECEMBER 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 9 December 2024.

- * Cllr David Hawkins (Chairman)
- * Cllr John Sleep (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * John Adams
- * 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

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, Tanya Coulter, Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje and Matt Wisdom.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs England, Hartmann, Millington, Osborne, Thierry and Wade.

35 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024, be confirmed.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

37 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**New Councillor Welcome**

The Chairman extended a warm welcome and offered his congratulations to Councillor John Adams, who was attending his first Full Council meeting, following his election to the Barton and Becton Ward in October.

Remembrance

The Chairman reported that, alongside the Vice-Chairman, the Armed Forces Champion and the Leader, the Council was represented at a number of Remembrance Services during November.

A special mention was given for the attendance of the Armed Forces Champion at the Armistice Day Commemoration, held at the Regimental Headquarters of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment RLC, where the Armed Forces Champion was given the honour of assisting with the presentation of Coronation Medals to the Soldiers.

A commemoration took place at Appletree Court on 11 November, where the Leader and the Chairman both laid a wreath, alongside some of the Council's staff veterans.

St Georges Hall

On 29 October, the Council joined Fawley Parish Council to host a special showcase of the upgraded facilities at St George's Hall, which included a tour of the renovated spaces, live demonstrations of the new amenities, and a number of speeches. Those who attended saw how the hall and grounds had been transformed, and the Chairman was particularly thrilled that local young people had somewhere warm, safe, and fun to go on a regular basis.

The Chairman highlighted that this initiative had been a partnership approach from day one, with several NFDC teams, Members, officers, Fawley Parish Council officers and Members, Hampshire County Council public health, the youth club, 17 Port and Maritime Regiment in Marchwood, and community members all coming together to deliver the ideas, provide funding, and work on a refurbished hall that delivered for local residents.

Engagements

The Chairman reported on the following further engagements undertaken since the last Council meeting:-

18 October

The Chairman attended the AGM of Stop Domestic Abuse Charity at Hedge End, including a presentation from their Chief Executive highlighting support services delivered by the charity to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The Chairman

had asked officers to look into how the charity might engage with NFDC as the Council's own Domestic Abuse Strategy was developed.

24 October

The Chairman was honoured to attend as His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire hosted the Award Ceremony for the South East Reserve Forces and Cadets Association at Lord Wandsworth College, Aldershot.

11 November

New Forest Mencap held its AGM, an organisation reaching out to communities to let them know they want to help make the UK the best place for people with a learning disability to live happy and healthy lives.

28 November

The Brilliance in Business Awards were held at Brockenhurst College. These awards acknowledged and celebrated individuals and businesses that demonstrated outstanding achievements.

4 December

The Chairman was delighted to host a reception for staff from across the Council with over 20 years' service. He was joined by the Leader, Chief Executive and the Executive Management Team, and by over 50 officers from across the workforce. Many of the attendees were nearing 40 years' service.

The Chairman expressed that Members really value this long service and commitment to the Council, and recognise the value of all the knowledge and input into the Council's services to local communities over these years. This was of course complimented by the experiences and ideas brought by the newer staff joining the Council in recent times.

Civic Service

The Chairman reported that he would be holding a Civic Service on Sunday 23 March 2025 at St Mary Magdalene Church, New Milton. He would be finalising the programme in the New Year and looked forward to sharing more details with Members soon.

Procedures

The Chairman thanked Members for taking part in the successful trial of the electronic voting system. He would ask officers to run a number of votes using the system and asked for Members' patience with the technology in the event of any issues.

He also reminded the Council that there would be a recorded vote on the setting of the tax base, as required by law.

38 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Leader referred to the display banner at Appletree Court, outlining how the district had benefitted from its £1 million allocation from the UK Shared Prosperity fund. These funds had been directed towards projects that delivered real, measurable value to local communities, many delivered by the Council. Projects like new play equipment in Fordingbridge and Ringwood, flower and bulb planting in Marchwood, improved beach shelters at Hordle Cliff, Barton Cliffs and Milford Promenade, creative hubs for LGBTQ+ young people in New Milton and Sway, and a weekly park run at Gang Warily Leisure Centre. Case studies for ten of these impactful projects had been completed and were available to view on the Council's website.

Enhanced football facilities in Ringwood

It was reported that the Council had worked with partners to deliver enhanced football facilities in Ringwood and, this month, the Leader was delighted to attend Ringwood Community Hub's opening event for their two-storey pavilion with changing rooms, offices and a club house. Prior to this, a 3G Artificial Turf Pitch opened for football training in February last year. The Council gave £535,000 towards this project, and this facility would help to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities.

Bartley Park, Totton

The Council was informed that Bartley Park in Totton had been extended and improved to include a meadow with new dog training and activity equipment, and a timber boardwalk, which established a circular walking route throughout the wider park. This extension was part of the Council's Green Way recreational mitigation programme, which aimed to enhance existing green spaces in the district.

Budget consultation

Last week the Council launched its budget consultation to Business Rate Payers within the New Forest. The Leader encouraged all business owners to respond via the Council's website.

39 GAMBLING ACT 2005 POLICY REVIEW

Cllr Tungate introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting held on 1 November 2024. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Statement of Principles in relation to the Gambling Act 2005, be approved.

40 POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2024

Cllr Tungate introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting held on 1 November 2024. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That Council agree:-

1. There should be no changes to the polling districts; and
2. The changes to polling places as set out in the table at Appendix 1 of the report.

41 REPORT OF CABINET - 6 NOVEMBER 2024

PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 6 November 2024.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Item 2 – Financial Monitoring Report (Based on Performance April to September 2024 inclusive)

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 6 November 2024. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve the £375,000 supplementary budget for the Hardley Depot scheme as a result of abnormal groundworks.

42 REPORT OF CABINET - 4 DECEMBER 2024

PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET

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

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Item 3 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26, Policy Review and Council Tax Premiums

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 4 December 2024. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr J Davies proposed an amendment to the recommendations, to remove the 10% minimum contribution from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Cllr Rackham seconded the amendment.

Members speaking for the amendment highlighted that the Task and Finish Group did recommend the removal of the 10% minimum contribution in view of income from empty homes premiums, and that it would save officer administration time. It was suggested that those with the least to spend, often spend what they have locally, supporting local businesses, therefore putting this income back into the area. Some Members expressed dissatisfaction that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel did not agree with the Task and Finish Group's recommendation on this subject.

Members speaking against the amendment highlighted the loss of nearly £300,000 of income across all precepting authorities, which presented challenges for the delivery of vital public services. It was noted that the most vulnerable of residents were already protected from this minimum contribution. Addressing administration, Members referred to the collection rate for council tax which was considered high performing.

In relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, it was highlighted that it was the Panel's remit to review the work of the Task and Finish Group and make onward recommendations to Cabinet.

The Leader of the Council highlighted some of the key priorities of the Council that would be impacted by this loss of income, including the homelessness assistance budget.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the Council approve:-

1. The changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1 April 2025:-
 - a. The removal of the Band D cap at an overall cost to precepting authorities of £33,000;
 - b. The increase of the de-minimus rule to £2 at no net cost; and
 - c. The alignment of childcare costs with universal credit for all claims at a saving of £3k to precepting authorities.
2. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme Sanctions and Prosecution Policy.

Item 4 – Council Tax 2025/26 – Setting the Tax Base

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 4 December 2024. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

One Member highlighted a marked increase in a particular area and questioned the reasons for this. Following an initial response from the Portfolio Holder, the Chairman of the Council suggested that this technical information could be supplied to Members outside of the meeting.

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

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

Voting against:- None.

Abstaining:- None.

The recommendations were carried unanimously, 42 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstaining.

RESOLVED:

That the Council approve:-

1. The calculation of the tax base for the year 2025/26 of £73,335.00; and
2. Pursuant to the report and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by this Council as its council tax base for the year 2025/26 as detailed in paragraph 13 of the report.

Item 5 – Leisure – Update and Proposed Fees and Charges 2025

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 4 December 2024. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

One Member was concerned that the perceived value for money of the contract might represent value for money for the Council, but questioned what this meant for service users, and the level of service provided. It was questioned whether Freedom had undertaken consultation with customers and service users on price rises and standards of service to support their proposals. Some concerns were raised that there could be an adverse impact on the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy objectives if customers were priced out of health and leisure services.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing highlighted the financial pressures for the organisation in trying to deliver services and the Council's priority to support its partner.

In responding to the debate, Cllr Heron welcomed the partnership with Freedom Leisure and was confident that value for money was to the benefit of the Council and to residents; both customers and non-customers of the health and leisure centres.

RESOLVED:

That the Council approve the proposed increases in fees and charges as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

43 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUBSTITUTIONS PROTOCOL

Cllr Cleary introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendations, which set out proposals for a protocol in support of substitute Members for Overview and Scrutiny Panels. She thanked Group Leaders for their support in developing the proposals. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Advice was provided to Members, that a proposed amendment in relation to the process for selecting the Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Panels was a separate substantive issue that could be brought forward for debate at a future meeting.

Members speaking in favour of the recommendations highlighted the ability to continue with meetings that represented the political makeup of the Council and that good scrutiny could be maintained.

Members speaking against the recommendations cited some concerns about the continuity of work by committees and panels where regular substitutions were taking place.

In responding to the debate, Cllr Cleary highlighted the expectations on substitute Members to stay engaged with the work of the Panels so that they could effectively engage as a voting Member when appointed.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:-

1. Approves the amendment to the Standing Orders of Meetings at paragraph of the report, to make provision for a Substitutions Protocol; and
2. Adopts the Substitutions Protocol, at Appendix 1 of the report.

44 ALLOCATION OF SEATS AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND PANELS

Cllr Cleary introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

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 12 of the report; and
2. Appoints councillors to individual committees and panels, as identified in Appendix 1 of the report, for the remainder of the four year period ending May 2027.

45 QUESTIONS

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

- From Cllr Alvey to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on planning applications within the Solent Freeport.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on New Street public conveniences, Lymington.
- From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on support for farmers through the local plan process.
- From Cllr Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on local government reorganisation.
- From Cllr Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on solar panels in car parks.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on Solent Freeport business rates.
- From Cllr Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on support to local communities.
- From Cllr Brand to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on transparency.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr S Davies, on housing waiting lists.
- From Cllr M Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Building Control.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing Cllr Poole, on Freedom Leisure.

Note – a copy of the full questions and replies are attached to these minutes.

CHAIRMAN

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Council – 9 December 2024 – Questions Under Standing Order 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Alan Alvey to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

At a recent Parish Council community consultation held to consider the recent revised planning application submitted for the Fawley Waterside site, it was clear that some residents believed that, because of the Freeport Zone status, NFDC would not be able to refuse the application.

Would the Portfolio Holder please confirm the situation with planning applications for sites within the Freeport Zone.

Reply:

I can confirm that the designation of the Fawley Waterside site as a Solent Freeport tax site does not alter the legal framework within which any planning application made to the District Council would need to be determined.

This legal framework provides for such applications to be determined against the policies of the Local Plan, unless there are material planning considerations which indicate otherwise. It is worth remembering that Fawley Waterside is a brownfield site and has in large part been used for historic and current commercial and industrial uses, not least as a power station with the associated levels of activity and vehicle movements.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on alleged breaches of planning conditions, the Portfolio Holder referenced the Council's adopted approach to planning enforcement.

Question 2

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Residents are rightly dismayed at the state of the public toilets in New Street, Lymington. Lymington is the retail capital of the New Forest but the state of these toilets are an embarrassment. When will these toilets be refurbished to the same standard as other local public toilets?

Reply:

The Council has 23 public conveniences across the district, provided free of charge, for residents and visitors to use. We have a rolling programme of maintenance and upgrading. In the meantime, these facilities are cleaned and restocked daily, 364 days of the year. In addition, our Streetscene supervisors undertake regular checks of the standards of the works achieved by our cleaners, to ensure it meets the requirements of their role.

Unfortunately, the toilets are only as clean as the last user left them in and not every user respects keeping the facility in the condition the cleaner achieved.

More worryingly has been the recent spate of vandalism of our facilities, from graffiti to fire setting to the breaking of equipment specifically installed to support our disabled communities. It is a district wide issue.

We report this criminal damage to the police and submit the evidence available to us. Our teams turn around any damage caused by vandalism or anti-social behaviour as efficiently as possible, and I know councillors will be as dismayed as I am that our facilities are so often vandalised and put out of action in this way.

Turning to the concerns raised over New Street in Lymington. I am sure the Cllr is aware, as a local Ward Member, there have recently been times where homeless people have sought to occupy some of the cubicles at the facility and this has limited regular access for cleaning staff, and also the public.

Homelessness is something that concerns all of us in this chamber, and the fact that someone feels that one of our toilet cubicles is their best chance of a suitable shelter will be of concern to us all. I'm pleased to say that our Homelessness Team are working hard to support these individuals, and as a by-product of this support, enable us to bring the cubicles back into use.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the refurbishment of the toilets, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that all public conveniences were reviewed annually as part of a priority list for appropriate refurbishment.

Question 3

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

Farming is of strategic importance to the UK, providing food security for our nation, reducing food miles, and providing well-managed countryside for our communities to enjoy. However, the NFDC's current call for sites will mean developers encouraging farm owners to offer up their land for speculative development opportunities. Can you tell me how this Council balances the need to support our farmers whilst also looking to meet Government house-building targets?

Reply:

The Call for Site exercise currently underway is an opportunity for people to put forward land for consideration for development, or which they feel could be used more productively in the future. It's an important part of work to help inform our Local Plan Review including future decisions about how we deliver sustainable development in the New Forest.

As you will be aware from previous briefings, any such plan also needs to be prepared in the context of national planning policies as set out by the government.

It is very clear that this government is prioritising a significant increase in house building across the country. However, it is also clear that some areas of the country are far more capable of delivering significant housing growth than ours.

This very point was made by me in response to the government consultation on these proposals when I wrote a separate letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Angela Rayner on 24th September.

Your point about the possible loss of productive farmland is well made and is something we will have to balance in the round as we make our new Local Plan.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on monitoring the loss of farmland to development, the Portfolio Holder suggested that he might be able to supply this data outside of the meeting following consultation with officers.

Question 4

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

With a Labour Government driving the push for larger Unitary Authorities, how will you ensure that the unique needs of the Community won't be overshadowed by the priorities of a much larger administrative body?

Reply:

Whilst there is much speculation as to the Labour Government's views on the future shape of local government we know that one size doesn't fit all – and that the New Forest is a unique place. With the National Park at the heart of our place we have communities that have connections west towards Christchurch, North towards Salisbury, and across the water. We have yet to see the much discussed Devolution White paper.

When this is eventually published we will be able to review what the range of proposals are and prepare our response as a Council accordingly. I also attend meetings of the leaders of Hampshire and Isle of Wight councils and we will within these forums look to represent the district's interests.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the needs of residents as part of any developing proposals, the Leader reaffirmed her commitment to representing the district and its residents' interests as part of ongoing discussions.

Question 5

From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Will the Council carry out a cost benefit analysis of constructing canopies with solar panels on District Council car parks?

Reply:

As Cllr Osborne will be aware, the Council is currently preparing a Parking Strategy for the District.

This strategy will create a vision for the future of our car parks and identify viable long-term options for the parking estate, look to support

new technologies, respond to the climate agenda, identify development opportunities and potentially generate more sustainable income levels.

I can confirm that an initial review of the viability of solar canopies will be considered as part of this strategy, which will come forward for consideration and approval in the spring next year.

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

Question 6

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

Can the Leader confirm how much in business rates and net gain NFDC have received currently from the Solent Freeport sites?

Reply:

Given my previous responses in this Chamber, and the various member briefings on the Freeport in the past, I suspect Cllr Rackham knows the answer to this question already.

Retained business rates are only generated by new development on the tax sites and can only be collected when they are operational. These developments need to secure planning permission and be built and occupied, but the incentive of the tax breaks is there for businesses who seek to locate and develop there. Landowners have until 2031 to complete and occupy developments to gain business rate reliefs.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on competing with other local authorities, the Leader confirmed that the relevant business rates would be retained in the district.

Question 7

From Cllr David Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole

Following the excellent local campaign being run by the 'Waterside Changemakers' what is NFDC doing to help address the lack of reliable and affordable transport options, which is leaving many Residents isolated or reliant on cars? And is this not an opportunity to be proactive and

work with County, Town and Parish Councils on a genuine issue for our Residents?

Reply:

Thank you for raising this matter. I share Cllr Harrison's and fellow councillors' concerns about the accessibility of services and facilities for many of our residents. Particularly those who don't have access to cars. Officers are in regular discussion with both parish and county council officers on a range of current transport matters and are exploring how best to support those communities most recently affected by changes to public transport routes.

In the longer term, the Local Plan provides an opportunity to explore whether there are longer term and more strategic interventions that can be made to improve the sustainability and accessibility of our communities. Members will be aware that an initial consultation will be undertaken on the issues and scope of the Local Plan early next year.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on support for community transport, the Portfolio Holder reiterated that officers were in discussion with partners on the relevant issues raised.

Question 8

From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

How does the Council plan to increase transparency and public engagement in its decision making process, particularly when major policies often seem to be decided behind closed doors?

Reply:

I must say I do not recognise the assertion being made in this question. The Council's Key Policy Framework governs those major policies and strategies that are required by law to be determined by Council, or that this Council has decided locally should be determined by Full Council.

Since the May 2023 elections, this Council has had lively debates and determined a number of key strategies and policies in an open and transparent manner, including our New Corporate Plan and Performance Management Framework, our Transformation Strategy, Customer Strategy, Tenant Engagement Strategy, and commencing a new Local Plan Review to name a few. Not only has the Council debated and determined these issues at this meeting, many of those subjects have had significant cross-party input through the work of Overview and Scrutiny Panels, and Task and Finish Groups.

Day to day executive decision making is made by the Council's Cabinet and my individual portfolio holders that have those delegated powers, as set out in our Constitution. This is entirely appropriate within our agreed Cabinet form of governance that provides strong accountable leadership and decision making.

Decision making is open and transparent and the accessibility provided by our high quality live streaming of public meetings is evidenced by the engagement of over 20,000 views on the Council's Youtube channel since the May 2023 elections.

Having said that as Leader I am always willing to follow up any specific concerns Members may have as best I can.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on levels of public engagement, particularly on Council run consultations, the Leader of the Council committed to looking at any further ways the Council could increase engagement in this area.

Question 9

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

Please can the portfolio holder update Council on the number of Families and Single people on the NFDC's housing waiting list? And how many have we successfully housed and provided suitable accommodation for since the last update?

Reply:

Out of a total of 2,008 households there are currently 980 families on the housing register who have at least one child aged under 18. There are 780 single person households. The balance is made up of other families and couples.

In the last two months 94 households have been housed in social housing. 39 of these households have at least one child aged under 18, and 42 are single people.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the impact of planning targets on the supply of accommodation, the Portfolio Holder committed to an update on this to the next Housing and Communities O&S Panel, including where the demand for temporary accommodation was coming from.

Second Questions

Question 10

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

Why, and to whom and for what benefit has NFDC outsourced building control?

Reply:

Post Grenfell and the subsequent inquiries, and recommendations, the importance of role of local government building control, in keeping our residents safe in their homes and buildings is paramount.

I was delighted that all the staff in our New Forest building control team met the new requirements placed on them by the Building Safety Act, demonstrating their competence with the required extra accreditations.

I'm sure all members of this chamber will join me in thanking them for their diligence and hard work in achieving this, on top of the day job.

Members will also be interested to note that our own Building Control Manager, Nick Ford has been working nationally to assess competence and accredit surveyors across the country, having himself been one of the first in the country to be accredited under the new competency requirements.

Whilst for many years it has been the case that some elements of building control can be delivered by the private sector, I can give you an absolute assurance that this Council has not outsourced its building control service, nor is it considering doing so.

I would be most interested to know where you heard any information to the contrary, as it seems so out of kilter with the national narrative around building control I have set out.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the Council's influence over external building control, citing a specific example, the Portfolio Holder welcomed details of the specific incident, of which he would be happy to look into.

Question 11

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

As the Portfolio Holder responsible for our 'partnership agreement' with Freedom Leisure, can he advise what feedback and engagement he undertakes on behalf of the Council, its Residents and Service Users with Freedom?

Reply:

I represent the Council on the Partnership Board. As a board, we meet quarterly and this involves senior employees of Freedom Leisure. At the meeting, key performance indicators are reviewed, including feedback from leisure centre users.

The Portfolio Holder also referenced support for the leisure centre Christmas collections, in support of Southampton's children's ward.

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