

27 SEPTEMBER 2023

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 Wednesday, 27 September 2023

- * 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:

Derek Tipp
Kate Crisell
Caroline Rackham
John Sleep
Christine Ward

Councillors:

Jack Davies
Barry Dunning
David Hawkins
Colm McCarthy

Also In Attendance:

Officers Attending:

James Carpenter, Clive Tritton, Joe Tyler and Karen Wardle

Apologies

There were no apologies.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr M Wade declared, for transparency purposes, a non-pecuniary interest in Item 3, Call-In Request – Shared Prosperity Funding, Town Centre Improvements, as a member of Hythe and Dibden Parish Council who are a beneficiary of the fund in question, he concluded that there were no grounds under common law to prevent him from remaining in the meeting to speak and to vote.

24 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

25 CALL IN REQUEST - SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDING, TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

CALL IN REQUEST - SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDING, TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

The Chairman explained the Call-In procedure and the reasons for the special meeting of the Panel.

The Democratic Services Officer explained the three options, as per the Council's Call in Procedure for Executive Decisions, to the Panel and displayed a presentation slide with these options throughout the meeting. The options available to the Panel were:

- a) Accept the decision (in which case it may be implemented immediately); or
- b) Request the decision-maker to reconsider the decision, giving reasons for the request. The decision-maker shall reconsider the decision as soon as reasonably practicable, (which in the case of a Cabinet decision shall normally be interpreted as at its next meeting). After reconsideration the decision, whether amended or not, may be implemented immediately, and may not be called in for a second time under the procedures in this Chapter; or
- c) Where the decision is of particular high local significance or public interest, refer the decision to full Council for debate at a Council meeting to be held within ten working days of the Panel meeting. If necessary to meet this timescale, a special Council meeting shall be held. The Monitoring Officer shall be responsible for arranging this. The decisionmaker shall reconsider the decision as soon as reasonably practicable after the Council meeting (which in the case of a Cabinet decision shall normally be interpreted as at its next meeting), in the light of the Council debate.

Cllrs Dunning, J Davies and McCarthy, who submitted the call-in requests, were invited to speak. The main points stated by the Cllrs were:

- There were 27 empty shops and charity outlets in Lymington High Street.
- The recently installed parking metres discouraged people from visiting the High Street.
- Covid had negatively impacted the High Street and local businesses.
- It was understandable that Totton should receive a share of the funding.
- Lymington's public toilets were in need of refurbishment and improvement.
- Pennington square, like Lymington High Street, required funding to mitigate the negative impact of Covid.
- It was understood that the criteria set for the funding meant that tourist destinations were ineligible.
- Lymington hosts many public events which adds pressure to the town's infrastructure.
- Pennington sits within the lowest 30% of the most deprived areas in the country.
- £8800 was marked as the administrative costs for the funding programme. It was suggested that this money should be used on projects in Lymington.
- The pavements and roads across Lymington and Pennington needed repairing.

The Assistant Director of Place Development presented the covering report and provided a summary of how the Executive Decision on the Shared Prosperity Funding, Town Centre Improvements was reached. The main points were:

- The decision itself related to the town centre improvement project, which was one part of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) submission. This was agreed by Cabinet at their meeting in July 2022.
- NFDC had received an allocation of £1m and had submitted a Local Investment Plan to government by August 2022. The decision related specifically to the tranche of funds that would realise town centre improvements.
- The specific segment of funding for town centre projects, was £211,200 which would be split with Totton Town Centre receiving £136,000 and 5 other town centres, each receiving an equal amount of £15,000.
- The £211,200 town centre project fund was purely for revenue funding and not capital.
- Throughout the process there had been a clear commitment to drive improvement in Totton and to invest the money in the spirit of restoring pride and a sense of belonging to those areas where it had been lost.
- Cabinet members wished to spread the funding as widely as possible whilst making a valuable improvement to recipient areas.
- Alternative funding streams would be available to any areas within the District that had not been awarded funding through this specific tranche of SPF. These alternative funding sources would be Rural England and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments.
- Ultimately, members and officers had made a judgement call on where the finite pot of funding could be used, within the criteria set.
- There would be no further Shared Prosperity Funding tranches based on specific areas.

Following the Officer's summary of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy thanked members for their input. The Portfolio Holder explained that careful consideration had gone into the allocation split and the final selection of town centres that would receive funding. Reference was made to the repairing of potholes, and it was explained that this funding could not be used in such a way. He encouraged the Panel to support the decision and not to delay the funding by attempting to re-evaluate the allocation of a small pot of available funding.

The Panel and other members present discussed the matter, the key comments made by members were as follows:

- Not all town centres within the District could receive funding and if this were to happen, the available funds would be spread too thinly to make meaningful difference to each area.
- It was recognised that Totton was in significant need of funding, and it was not disputed by any members that Totton should receive a significant part of the funding allocation. It was noted that Totton would not be eligible for Rural England funding.
- More people were moving into Totton and therefore the need for improvement of the town centre was increasing.
- Reference was made to the Freeport and specifically the infrastructure that was needed to support the increase in people coming into the District and the communities within it.

- The majority of Panel members spoke in support of the decision taken by the Portfolio Holder. A few members of the panel were in favour of allocating the £8,800 figure, marked as the administration costs for this tranche of funding, as town centre funding to Lymington.
- A member questioned the amount of CIL money Lymington and Pennington Town Council had. In response, it was noted that the District Council only had details of the money which had been spent, rather than allocated towards specific projects.
- The funding must be used on revenue projects and not on capital, as prescribed by the split in the Council's £1m UKSPF.

The Cllrs who had submitted the call-in request, along with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, were all given the opportunity to sum-up following the discussion.

The Chairman reminded the Panel of the options available to them prior to considering a recommendation from the Panel.

RESOLVED

That the Portfolio Holder decision be accepted.

CHAIRMAN