

**20 MARCH 2025**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 20 March 2025

\* Cllr Alan O'Sullivan (Chairman)  
Cllr Barry Dunning (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

\* Alan Alvey  
\* Jack Davies  
\* Jacqui England  
\* Barry Rickman

**Councillors:**

\* Alex Wade  
\* Christine Ward  
\* Phil Woods

\*Present

**In attendance:**

**Substitutes:**

Cllr John Adams  
(Substitute for Cllr Barry Dunning)

**Councillors:**

Jill Cleary  
Jeremy Heron

**Councillors:**

John Sleep

**Officers Attending:**

Kate Ryan, Alan Bethune, Ingrid Archer, Rich Bird, Matt Wisdom, Andy Rogers, Rebecca Drummond, Kim Gray, Kate Hardy, Philip Marston, Saqib Yasin and John Cooper

**Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Barry Dunning. Cllr John Adams was in attendance as substitute.

**44 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

**45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**46 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**47 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN**

The Panel considered the Corporate peer challenge report and action plan.

The report followed a 3-day visit of the Peer Challenge team, which comprised of members and officers from various professions and political parties and different authorities. The team undertook 40 meetings and interviews with 120 people including external stakeholders.

The Panel considered the Council motion regarding the process for selecting chairmen and vice chairmen of committees and panels. Some members supported the motion, pointing to the recommendation of the peer review team that the Council consider ways to strengthen its overview and scrutiny function, including as a suggested option of 'opposition-led scrutiny'. It was stated that this was done in other councils, led to greater effectiveness, accountability and transparency, and was considered best practice. They further pointed out that this appeared to be the only recommendation that had not been carried through to the action plan. It was suggested that the motion could be amended to focus on Overview and Scrutiny Panels, rather than all committees and panels.

Other members disagreed with the motion and felt that the issue highlighted in the peer report only contained a suggestion 'to consider' the matter, rather than a direct recommendation to make changes. They felt the current arrangements provided ample opportunity for the opposition to question the administration in a transparent way. It was also pointed out that there was a degree of uncertainty with LGR and it was felt that the current arrangements should stay in place to provide stability.

Members were reminded that the Council's constitution provided for a series of secret ballots to take place at the annual Council meeting if a position for chairman or vice chairman was contested.

When considering other aspects of the peer report, Members noted mention of the good work of the housing team, though acknowledged the council was performing below the affordable housing target whilst noting the reasons for this.

In respect of Appendix 3 and the list of delivery activities, a member highlighted the need to continue to make representations regarding the upgrading of the A326.

Members emphasised the need to maintain a running dialogue with town and parish councils regarding LGR. It was noted that a recent meeting had been held with all clerks to parish and town councils 2 weeks ago, and a further meeting involving NFALC was being arranged for 28 April at Lyndhurst Community Centre, to which all parish and town councils were invited.

A member felt that the development of an Asset Strategy and Action plan needed to be expedited and brought forward earlier than the July timescale. In response, officers explained the intention to bring this item to the next Panel meeting in June with a view to agreement by the Cabinet and Council in July.

Members supported the intention to recruit councillors from more diverse backgrounds and age groups. This was a point for political leaders to consider and

for the Council's elections team to bear in mind when devising communications running up to the next election. They also supported the recommendations for member development initiatives in the report, and noted that discussions had been held with group leaders on how this would be responded to.

In summary overall, the Panel was pleased to note such a positive report from the Peer Review Team and felt that the Council should celebrate its achievements.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet be advised:

- (i) That having considered the Council motion regarding the process for selecting chairmen and vice chairmen of committees and panels, this Panel recommends that the process should remain unchanged, for the reasons set out above.
- (ii) That the LGA's feedback report be noted.
- (iii) That with the exception of the Panel's views as per (i) above, the action plan at Appendix 2, the observations and feedback in Appendix 3 and the deliverables at Appendix 4, be endorsed.

**48 FUTURE NEW FOREST PROGRAMME**

The Panel received a presentation giving updates on various aspects of the Future New Forest programme, including a people strategy, digital projects, and assets strategy. The supporting presentation materials were available in the agenda pack.

A query was raised relating to the assets section in part on the previous agenda item, where the red KPIs were shown relating to the Coastal Destination Strategy. It was explained that this was a medium to longer term initiative to think about how the Council could make most of assets along the coast and to attract more visitors to the coast and away from the National Park.

On the red indicator for the Coastal Partnership Model, it was explained that this related to the longer-term future of the coastal team and scope for working as part of broader coastal partnerships across the South Coast. Whilst this might still be a direction of travel, time was needed to understand more about the implications of LGR before progress could be made.

Some members commented on the programme progress update, and sought information on how performance would be measured. It was explained that the programme team came together in September / October and a lot of the work was budgeted for 2025/26. Therefore, progress on the financial aspects would be reported regularly at appropriate times. ICT work would include the level of budget detail sought as projects progressed. On updates regarding the business case and invest to save, it was noted that LGR had required an examination of which projects were business critical including replacement of the CRM to enhance customer service. The business case was currently being reviewed and a further update on this would be given at the next Panel meeting.

On the section dealing with the asset management strategy, a query was raised concerning the process for dealing with transfer of assets of community value, officers advised that it was important that any body wishing to take on the running

of an asset should have the full information required regarding the costs and other requirements for managing the asset, and this piece of work would ensure arrangements were in place to make this available.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that the July asset strategy report would include the adoption of the community asset transfer policy and seek approval to the direction of travel. This would also mark the start of a process of discussions with town and parish councils, which could continue for at least 2 years, towards the vesting date in 2028 or 2029. Members commented that town and parish councils would like to see this process resolved as quickly as possible before shadow authorities took effect. In response it was reiterated that the necessary framework and policy needed to be agreed before such work could take place and this was currently being developed. Various asset information was also being formulated and collated as part of this process.

In answer to a question, assurances were given that the necessary governance and precautions would be in place when the council was discussing council systems with other organisations, so sensitive data continued to be protected.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**49 ANNUAL ICT DELIVERY UPDATE**

The Panel received the Annual ICT Delivery Update. A copy of the presentation material was available with the agenda pack.

The Panel were shown operational performance data, details of cyber security and compliance arrangements, financial information in relation to ongoing projects, ICT benefits realisation from investment, and a snapshot of the current position with service delivery and projects progress.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**50 DIGITAL STRATEGY 2025 - 2028**

The Panel considered a proposed Digital Strategy for 2025 – 2028.

The Strategy had been developed in consultation with EMT and having regard to private and public sector trends.

Progress against the strategy would be regularly monitored and work was focussed on the Transformation and the Customer strategies, whilst remaining agile and adapting to new technology and supporting LGR requirements. An action plan would be finalised in due course.

**RESOLVED:**

That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that the Digital Strategy 2025-2028 as set out in the report be approved and adopted.

**51 PLATINUM JUBILEE BUSINESS PARK**

The Panel received an update on the Platinum Jubilee Business Park.

The primary focus of the report related to an issue concerning a requirement to comply with Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), which was not set as a planning condition until part way through the construction process. The development site had been the first Council project to be purchased for industrial development, and this took place at a time when much of the groundwork had already been undertaken. This in turn meant that there were issues surrounding the related documentation of various aspects pertaining to the site around the time it was acquired, which were relevant to BREEAM requirements.

The Panel noted the project had been delivered within the allocated budget of £8.445m and an overall underspend of £460k had occurred. More than £250k had been dedicated to sustainable elements of the development. Over 70% of the floor space was now let, much of which to local businesses, promoting local employment and generating income for the Council, and as such the project delivered was viewed as an economic and commercial success.

In answer to a query on why the land had been purchased in 2019, but the Business Case had not been produced until 2021, it was explained that the delay was largely due to the disruption relating to the pandemic.

In response to a question on why the BREEAM accreditation had been included as a planning condition given the related difficulties, it was acknowledged that BREEAM was viewed as an aspiration, and in hindsight the opportunity should have been taken to challenge the condition more fully when it arose at the planning stage.

Some members commented on the abortive costs of the business park BREEAM consultant and sought reassurances that measures were in place to prevent similar problems occurring. It was noted that important learning from the issue had been taken on board and the project at Hardley Depot was on track to achieve BREEAM accreditation.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**52 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARDS**

The Panel received performance data on services falling under the scope of this panel.

The format of the report had been adjusted taking account of member comments from previous meetings, and it was recommended that the report be viewed electronically to enable zooming into detail. It had been colour coded to show which KPIs related to their respective panels.

A member raised a query relating to the next resident insight survey not taking place for 2 years and how related data could be scrutinised. It was explained that the timing of the surveys had been a result of the reprioritisation, though the targets and their effectiveness would be reviewed in the year end report to Cabinet. A

member suggested that a KPI be included around engagement with parish and town councils in relation to the assets strategy.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**53 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE**

The Panel received updates from the portfolio holders.

**Cllr Cleary, Leader**

The Leader had been very engaged with numerous devolution and LGR meetings at HCC and the response to Government. The issues would be discussed that evening at full Council.

A great deal of work had been incorporated into the Future New Forest report which she felt was excellent.

The Leader continued to chair the Waste Programme Board and oversight of the roll out regarding the new service and operational issues.

In answer to a question, the Leader felt the Peer review outcome had been an excellent result for the Council and she paid tribute to Rebecca Drummond, Assistant Director, Transformation, and her team for the work involved in achieving this. The Council needed to focus on continued delivery, as well as making a strong case for LGR that would deliver the best possible result for residents, staff and the Council, given the unique character of the New Forest.

**Cllr Jeremy Heron, Finance and Corporate**

It was reported that work was ongoing dealing with the implications of the Government's financial settlement. There was no prospect as yet of multiyear settlements, especially given LGR.

Cllr Heron also paid tribute to the Council's Revenues and Benefits team, who were in the process of issuing the annual Council tax bills to every household in the District, which was a significant task undertaken well.

He also praised the Council's ICT Service and its ongoing work protecting the Council's systems from some 1500 cyber-attacks per month which were ever more complex. He also acknowledged the successful implementation of Windows 11, both of which only represented a small element of the work undertaken by the service.

**54 WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN