

2 JULY 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 2 July 2025

* Cllr Jill Cleary (Chairman)

* Cllr Steve Davies (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Geoffrey Blunden
- * Jeremy Heron

*Present

Councillors:

- * Dan Poole
- Derek Tipp

In attendance:

Councillors:

Alan Alvey
Peter Armstrong
Steve Clarke
Philip Dowd
Alan O'Sullivan

Councillors:

Joe Reilly
Steve Rippon-Swaine
John Sleep
Neil Tungate
Christine Ward

Officers Attending:

Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Rebecca Drummond, Lottie Elms, Tim Guymer, Richard Knott, Jeannie Satchell, Joe Tyler, Karen Wardle, Paul Whittles, Amanda Wilson, Matt Wisdom and Saqib Yasin

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr D Tipp.

1 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader announced that the new waste collection service started on 9 June to residents in the phase 1 area, which included Brockenhurst, Lymington, New Milton, and the surrounding areas.

As part of the new service, New Forest District Council (NFDC) had delivered over 116,000 wheelie bins and food caddies to more than 30,000 households in the phase 1 area. In the first 3 weeks of the new service, the Council had already collected 107 tonnes of separate food waste.

The Leader thanked all staff, from the hard-working waste refuse teams and to those who had planned and supported this change behind the scenes.

As the largest operational change for the council, some teething issues were expected, but the Leader was proud that the Council had worked together to resolve any issues, and would continue to improve both the service, and recycling rates, for the district.

The Council would now begin to look ahead to prepare for phase 2, which would start in October 2025, with phase 3 in March 2026.

Last month, in readiness for 2026 to 2027, the Council had opened applications to local organisations, community groups, and businesses for grants of up to £100,000 towards funding local infrastructure projects. This funding was available through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and the application window would remain open until 8 August. Over the last 2 years, the Council had awarded funds towards nearly 60 projects around the district.

Community groups and businesses could also apply for up to £10,000 in funding from the Community Grant Scheme and Supporting Local Business Grant Scheme. The funding was from the Government's UK Rural England Prosperity Fund which supports local growth and community impact. Applications closed on 30 June, and the Council was starting to review the submissions. Projects awarded funding would need to be delivered before the end of March 2026.

The Leader announced that the Council had been awarded silver in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, which celebrates UK employers who demonstrate exceptional support to those who serve, or have served in the Armed Forces, as well as their families.

The award scheme works in stages from bronze, silver, and gold award levels, reflecting a journey of continued development and dedication. The Leader was proud that the Council had achieved silver, which marked another significant step in the progression towards gold.

2 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2025 be confirmed and signed.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

5 CORPORATE PLAN KEY PERFORMANCE DATA FOR QUARTER 4 2024-2025, AND TARGET REFRESH APRIL 2025 TO MARCH 2026

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet –

1. Approved the Quarter 4 Dashboard; and
2. Approved the Target Refresh Measures.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

Leaders / all

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Leader introduced the item and was pleased to announce that the Council's performance continued to be good across most areas. The Leader explained that it was not possible to report on some of the measures due to the decision to deprioritise them in light of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process. However, the Council would continue to monitor performance across services. It was noted that the new style of the dashboards showcased the annual narrative and explained the reasons behind certain measures and the improvements undertaken. The performance indicators would continue to be reviewed and opportunities would continue to be taken to review the targets given the current context.

The Performance and Insight Manager provided further points of information on the report. He explained that the new reporting format included a richer data set and allowed the Council to reframe and better illustrate the progress of the journey so far. The narrative history provided showed emerging trends or patterns and allowed cross examination alongside the steps taken to address any areas of underperformance. It was explained that there were 32 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the report as well as a summary of performance.

In terms of the Target Refresh, Cabinet heard that targets for each of the measures for the next financial year had been explored and approval was sought. The Council's Scrutiny Panels had reviewed the targets. The revised format enabled a more effective cross examination and the new dashboards were acknowledged as clearer and more accessible with a healthy balance of green ratings across the board. It was confirmed that there would be the opportunity for measures to be reviewed on those areas where the Council had received feedback.

Cabinet members expressed the view that the dashboards were an important opportunity to review and reflect in order to form lessons for learning. It was commented that staff continually provide excellent services and positive results. It was acknowledged that by being thorough in the measurement of performance the Council could improve their overall services.

Reference was made to the improvements seen in fly tipping management, chargeable waste, recycling rates and the reduction in carbon emissions from the Council's fleet.

A non-Cabinet member made comment about the measure of staff-turnover. The Assistant Director for Transformation explained that work was under way to understand this matter in more detail. Optional exit interviews were seldom taken up and it was not easy to understand leaver destinations. To gain better insight this, HR would carry out a data-gathering exercise, working with managers of those staff leaving and monitor the results to inform future actions.

Another non-Cabinet member commented on the measure of staff sickness days. Cabinet heard that although sickness remains a challenge, the performance rating had improved from red to amber over previous quarters. Cabinet was reassured that work continued with the Council's HR team to support service managers on the matter of staff sickness absence.

6 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2024/25

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet note the Corporate Plan: Annual Performance Report 2024/2025.

KEY DECISION:

No

PORTFOLIO:

Leaders / all

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Leader introduced the item. She was proud of the first full performance report on the Council's new Corporate Plan.

The Performance and Insight Manager explained that the Annual Performance report 2024/2025 upheld the Council's principle of transparency and accountability, in line with the Corporate Plan priority areas and was underpinned by the New Forest's Transformation Programme. The Council's Executive Management Team had reviewed the content of the report and their comments and questions had been included. The report had been well received by the Council's Scrutiny Panels. They acknowledged that there had been an effective overview and narrative of the achievements made in the past year. Qualitative evidence within the report further detailed the work that had been undertaken to achieve the Council's priorities.

Cabinet members gave their thanks to staff across all service areas for their hard work. The positive Panel comments were noted, and the broad variety of services the Council provides were acknowledged. LGR was considered as an opportunity for the Council to be viewed positively and for its performance to be acknowledged.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness explained that a tenant of the Council had been made a co-opted member of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and that this level of engagement in Council decision making was very positive.

7 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT – PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Noted the provisional outturn of the General Fund, HRA, and Capital budgets for 2024/25;
- 2) Noted the year-end rephasing, as included in the provisional outturn figures;
- 3) Approved an additional £350,000 is added to the Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation reserve; and
- 4) Recommends that Council approve adding £500,000 to the Capital Programme to facilitate improvement across the Council's depot estate.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Council

PORTFOLIO:

Finance and Corporate

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the item and highlighted that there had been an exceptionally good outturn when compared to the national picture. Interest earnings had exceeded the budget and there had been a small amount of rephasing. The Capital Programme continued to be delivered at an improvement to previous years. The Council stood in a good position financially going into LGR, although it was acknowledged that it would be a challenging time as there would be future requirements to deliver more services across additional areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness noted that the Council would be transferring funds into the Acquisition and Development Reserve following a surplus in the Housing Revenue Account. This demonstrated the Council's skill and performance within the Housing department.

The Assistant Director of Finance provided further points of information on the report. He explained that the report set out the Council's General Fund and the HRA Capital Budget. There had been positive variations within the General Fund totalling £3.366 million, that would enable a top up of £350,000 to the Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Reserve and £500,000 allocated to the Capital Programme for welfare improvements across the Council's depot estate.

Reference was made to the Housing Revenue Account and the surplus that would be transferred to the Acquisition and Development reserve.

A question was posed by a non-Cabinet member on savings within the recycling and waste service and specifically whether, during phase 2, there had been any thought on increasing the coverage for complaints and feedback from residents. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate explained that proposals to move money across to the service had been discussed and that as it was a major change, the Council intended for more resources to be made available to make it as good a service as possible for residents.

A question was raised on the decrease in parking income in the last quarter of 2024. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate stated that there had been a reduction in the metered income as well as in the parking clock sales for the 4th quarter. Additionally, the number of Parking Contravention Notices issued had also seen a reduction.

8 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2024/25

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Approved the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25;
2. Approved the self-assessments against the Complaint Handling Codes; and
3. Approved the governing body's response to the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

Finance and Corporate / Housing and Homelessness

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holders for Finance and Corporate and Housing and Homelessness introduced the item and both spoke to the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness explained that the report had been scrutinised by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Part of the report concerned complaints that the Council had received over the past year from tenants to the Council in its capacity as a landlord. The report also included the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Portfolio Holder stated that it was unfortunate when any tenant felt the need to complain but that it was vitally important that the Council make the complaint process as simple and helpful as possible. A complaint was considered to be an opportunity to improve services and make progress.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate highlighted that there had been a service level improvements in the last financial year and that the process was a helpful learning tool. It was recognised that there would always be complaints to learn from and that it was important that residents can make contact with the Council easily and raise issues in a simple format so that they can be resolved.

The Service Manager for Legal and Information Governance provided further points of information on the report and appendices. It was explained that the Council was required to report on the complaints received throughout the year. Both the Resources and Transformation and the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panels had provided useful feedback and that their comments would be taken forward by officers. Sections 5, 6, 9 and 10 of the report were highlighted.

Finally, it was heard that the report contained details of where complaints had not been accepted by the Council and where positive feedback had been received across all service areas.

9 HAMPSHIRE AND THE SOLENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - PROGRAMME AND RESOURCES**RESOLVED:**

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the progress made on the development of final local government reorganisation proposals by September 2025;
2. Agreed that the priority for LGR proposals are:-
 - a. Financially sustainable rural focused unitary council, bringing together the New Forest area with mid Hampshire.
 - b. An authority that does not split the historic communities of the New Forest through boundary changes, or forces the district into an urban-led model.
3. Supports the active engagement in competing proposals for LGR in Hampshire and the Solent, to best represent and campaign for the above priorities, including the strong opposition to any proposals that involve

boundary changes that would split the historic communities of the New Forest; and

4. Supports the establishment of the LGR Programme Governance and Member oversight arrangements detailed in the report, alongside current programme activity and spend incurred from the established LGR reserve.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

Leaders

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Leader introduced the item and spoke at length about NFDC's views on the matter of LGR.

She encouraged all stakeholders to respond to the consultation on LGR. Cabinet heard that the Council's focus would be on making the case for new, rural unitary authority of which the New Forest would be a key part of.

The Leader emphasised that Option 1 would be the natural fit for the District and that it would protect the residents of the New Forest while meeting their needs through service provision that was designed around them. Option 1 would also promote sustainable growth through rural practices and innovation.

The Leader explained that the new authority must maintain a connection with rural life and encouraged all stakeholders, residents and businesses to support Option 1.

The Leader made it clear that Option 2 would not be supported by NFDC. It was heard that Option 2 would make the New Forest an extension of a city, which fundamentally misunderstood the needs of the residents, businesses and the unique environment. All of these elements would need to be finely balanced to meet their needs of community and conservation, which Option 2 would not provide. Option 2 would lead to poorer services for New Forest residents and would risk the sustainability of the area going forward. NFDC has long adopted a planning approach which understood the pressures, duties and sensitivities that comes with managing land within the District.

Option 3, it was explained, would fracture NFDC and would split the historic footprint across two new Councils. The Leader stated that this would be an insult to the communities across the New Forest. Option 3 would ignore the rural identity of the communities within the Waterside. The residents of Hythe, Fawley, Totton and

Marchwood did not identify with high-rise city centres and were more accustomed to the environment of rural life.

The Leader encouraged all consultation responders to oppose Option 2 and Option 3.

The Assistant Director, Strategy and Engagement provided further points of information on the report. He explained that the report summarised the feedback received from Government on the interim plan for LGR. This response was to all 15 councils across Hampshire and the Solent. The response came in answer to the ongoing work that all constituent authorities had invested in the LGR process. The latest engagement opportunity, which went live on Monday 30 June, would enable all stakeholders to have their say and had been commissioned by 12 councils working together.

Appendix 2 demonstrated in more detail the impact that Option 3 would have on the New Forest and its Waterside parishes and wards.

Cabinet members agreed with the Leader's comments and endorsed Option 1.

Non-Cabinet members echoed the points raised and acknowledged that the process was ever moving. Following a question on the business case that will be put to Government, Cabinet was reassured that officers and Cabinet were continually working to promote NFDC's option of choice. It was acknowledged that there had been significant, collaborative work undertaken to this point by the 12 authorities and that there was a number of work streams on the configuration of the new authority.

A non-Cabinet member referred to the need for a sense of place for the New Forest in the new authority and therefore hoped that any plans being made would include Town and Parish Councils. The Leader confirmed that she had asked this question at workshops and that a letter had been sent to the Government. It was explained that despite the Government's response on this issue being ambiguous, NFDC would continue to support the inclusion of its Town and Parish Councils in the configuration of the new authority.

The Assistant Director, Strategy and Engagement explained that the findings of the Waterside engagement were being drafted and would be available shortly.

10 STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICY

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet recommend that Council approve:

1. the Strategic Asset Management Plan 2025-28 ('SAMP') and the high-level actions which flow from the Plan;
2. the Asset Disposal Policy;
3. the Community Asset Transfer policy;
4. the re-direction of the £1.5 million Corporate Priorities reserve to support the delivery of the SAMP, resulting in the full budget equalisation reserve being available to support budget preparation over the medium-term period;

5. the approval of a delegation to the Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation to drawdown the Corporate Priorities reserve for the purposes of SAMP delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources; and
6. the approval of a delegation to the Chief Executive and Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation in their positions as Transformation Board members, to take decisions in accordance with the Governance arrangements as set out in the SAMP and associated policies.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Council

PORTFOLIO:

Finance and Corporate

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the item and highlighted that the Council had a duty to ensure that its assets were well managed. From this, the Council was keen to see any opportunities explored for the potential transfer of its open spaces or assets to Town and Parish Councils, where appropriate.

The Assistant Director for Transformation stated that the report and its appendices were a detailed documentation that provides important structure and framework for the handling of the Councils assets, shaped around the delivery of five pillars that contain interlinked objectives. The plan was a high-level roadmap of realistic actions within a short time frame. The plan had been considered by the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel which had commented on the document and agreed that it was a comprehensive and positive plan. There were two constructive suggestions made by the Panel, highlighted by the Chairman of the Panel as requesting more information on the time limits facing the Council and the involvement of Ward members in the process. The Panel understood that the plan's delivery would need to take place at speed.

A non-Cabinet member asked whether Town and Parish Councils could be given the opportunity to apply for the transfer of assets. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate encouraged Town and Parish Councils to feedback on the process. However, it was acknowledged that the Council would need to consider the significant time constraints and resource demands in setting a programme of activity in this area.

11 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER(S) REVIEW & EXTENSION**RESOLVED:**

That Cabinet approved a public consultation is undertaken to evidence and support the renewal of the orders in their current form from 1 July 2026.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

Community, Safety and Wellbeing

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing introduced and endorsed the report, noting there was only one year until expiration of the two Public Space Protection Orders. It was explained that the PSPOs had been a successful vehicle for communication, discussion, engagement and learning on the matter across the New Forest.

The Strategic Director of Housing and Communities provided further points of information on the report. He explained that the overarching aim continued to be to educate residents and visitors on protecting the New Forest and its animals. The level of interactions and mixture of interactions through both PSPOs showed the level of education which had been given. The Fire Service had reported a reduction in fire incidents which was a positive outcome in the last year. The number of fixed penalty notices that had been issued was low and therefore also reflected that engagements had mostly resulted in the ceasing of activities. The Strategic Director of Housing and Communities explained that Option A within the recommendations paragraph was the option being recommended to Cabinet as opposed to Options B and C. It was confirmed that Option A had been supported by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Portfolio Holders agreed that most residents and visitors to the New Forest wanted to conform to the rules and to help protect the Forest and its animals. The focus was on education rather than enforcement. It was remarked that there had been a high number of incidents and that there had been some high-profile incidents. Cabinet commented that the high-profile incidents had provided new platforms by which the guidance could be publicised. It was acknowledged that the Council and its partners, such as the Forestry England, had worked hard on monitoring and educating on the matter throughout the last year.

A non-Cabinet member asked a question on public interaction. The Strategic Director of Housing and Communities explained that any incidents should be raised

with the Council and that the consultation would give the Council fresh advice on how to promote the information and awareness. It was heard that meetings had taken place with the Commoners Association and other bodies across the Forest to work on signage and how best to target visitors and residents. The Safer New Forest partnership had also done lots of work over Summer to work with partners so that tourist hotspots would have the relevant literature available.

The Leader clarified the recommendations and proposed that Cabinet support Option A.

12 ADOPTION OF THE NEW FOREST SKILLS ACTION PLAN

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Noted and adopted the content of the New Forest Skills Action Plan and accompanying Technical Report; and
2. Supported the objectives and recommended actions of the New Forest Skills Action Plan including the setting up of a New Forest Skills Group.

KEY DECISION:

Yes

PORTFOLIO:

Planning and Economy

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy was unable to attend the meeting and therefore the Leader introduced the item.

The New Forest had a set of unique work force challenges and therefore needed to unlock opportunities particularly in light of the Solent Freeport. The New Forest Skills Action Plan followed extensive research from stakeholders, key education providers and neighbouring authorities, identifying the key issues facing the area. Some of the key issues were: the Forest's aging population, the shortage of higher skilled jobs, the widening of the gender pay gap, a reliance on low paid work, barriers such as public transport, an outflow of young people and a lack of affordable housing.

To tackle these challenges, the plan set out 4 objectives: inclusive growth, a positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also supporting established sectors, lifelong learning and upskill and effective coordination of skills delivery.

The Plan would allow the Council to monitor efforts alongside the regional and national priorities whilst supporting the Corporate Plan priorities. The plan would also enable the Council to secure future funding for skills-based development.

The Assistant Director for Place Development provided further points of information on the report. He explained that this was the first skills action plan for NFDC and covered the District as a whole. The Plan had benefitted from significant engagement with the Council's partners. A skills group for the New Forest would be set up to help coordinate the development and delivery of skills training across partner providers. The Council looked forward to working with these partners and for the Economic Development team to ensure good quality skills training across the Forest.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate explained that the Council must grasp the opportunity to upgrade and work on its people's skills development and the data within the report illustrated the target groups which had been identified.

A non-Cabinet member requested that explicit mention be given to residents with disabilities within the plan. The Assistant Director for Place Development reassured Cabinet that the Council would ensure that part of the New Forest Skills Group would include the intention to work with people with disabilities.

CHAIRMAN