



**New Forest**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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# Council Meeting Agenda

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**13 April 2026**





# SUMMONS

To All Members of the Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the District Council to be held in Council Chamber - Appletree Court, Beaulieu Road, Lyndhurst, SO43 7PA on Monday, 13 April 2026, at 6.30 pm



**Kate Ryan**  
Chief Executive

Appletree Court, Lyndhurst, Hampshire. SO43 7PA  
[www.newforest.gov.uk](http://www.newforest.gov.uk)

This agenda can be viewed online (<https://democracy.newforest.gov.uk>). It can also be made available on audio tape, in Braille and large print.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting. The seating capacity of our Council Chamber public gallery is limited under fire regulations to 22.

Members of the public can watch this meeting live, or the subsequent recording, on the [Council's website](#). Live-streaming and recording of meetings is not a statutory requirement and whilst every endeavour will be made to broadcast our meetings, this cannot be guaranteed. Recordings remain available to view for a minimum of 12 months.

Anyone wishing to attend the meeting should contact the name and number shown below.

Enquiries to: Karen Wardle  
Email: [democratic@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:democratic@nfdc.gov.uk)  
Tel: 023 8028 5071

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# AGENDA

## Apologies

### 1. MINUTES (Pages 7 - 32)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2026 as a correct record.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

To note any declarations of interests made by members in connection with an agenda item. The nature of the interests must also be specified.

Members are asked to discuss any possible interests with Democratic Services prior to the meeting.

## **3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **4. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **5. NOTICE OF PETITION - KEEP THE NEW FOREST TOGETHER (Pages 33 - 34)**

To consider the following [live petition](#) of 5,350 signatures (when submitted) to New Forest District Council regarding the Government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation, from James and Emily Hartley-Binns, in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme:-

"We are calling on New Forest District Council to take two immediate steps:

### **1. Seek a formal Counsel Opinion**

NFDC should urgently instruct a specialist public-law barrister to review the process, the criteria and the consultation evidence to determine whether there are solid grounds for legal challenge. This work could be carried out in collaboration with Test Valley Borough Council, who are also at risk of seeing parts of their area absorbed into Southampton. A joint approach would strengthen the case, share expertise and demonstrate unified local opposition. This is a standard, responsible step for any council facing a decision of this scale. Seeking a formal Counsel's Opinion is a logical, proportionate and relatively inexpensive first step. It does not commit NFDC to legal action, it simply allows a specialist public-law barrister to assess whether the Government's decision-making process meets the required standards. This is the safest and most responsible way for the Council to 'test the waters' before considering a Judicial Review. It ensures that any further action is grounded in expert advice, shared evidence, and a clear understanding of the legal position.

### **2. Pursue a Judicial Review if the Counsel Opinion confirms there are grounds**

If the legal advice supports it, NFDC must act swiftly and pursue a Judicial Review to contest the break-up of the New Forest District. The window to act is extremely short. Once the proposals move to the next stage, reversing them becomes far harder."

Note: The petition organiser will present the petition for a maximum of five minutes. Councillors will then debate the petition for a maximum of 15 minutes.

## **6. REPORT OF CABINET - 4 MARCH 2026 (Pages 35 - 40)**

## **7. REPORT OF CABINET - 1 APRIL 2026 (To Follow)**

**8. QUESTIONS (To Follow)**

To ask questions under Standing Order 22. Questions received will be published ahead of the meeting. (Members are reminded that questions must be submitted to Democratic Services by no later than 12.00 noon, Wednesday, 8 April 2026).

**9. NOTICE OF MOTION**

In accordance with Standing Order 21, Cllr Thierry will move the following motion:-

*That New Forest District Council ensures that every Councillor, should they so wish, can serve on at least one committee or panel position by amending the Council's Standing Orders.*

*Background*

*Currently, the council comprises 48 members drawn from various political interests and independents.*

*The current Standing Orders preclude membership of a committee or panel place and a vote in certain circumstances. The current system produces a two-tier committee or panel structure, which amounts to discrimination.*

*Major Council political parties and groupings have had the opportunity to address this discrepancy, but have failed to do so.*

*All Councillors elected to the New Forest District Council should have equal opportunity.*

Under the provisions of Standing Order 42, the above motion, after being proposed and seconded (without speeches), should stand referred to the body within whose terms of reference the subject matter of the motions comes, or the Cabinet or such Committees or Panels that the Council may determined.

The Chairman may allow the motion to be dealt with at this meeting if they consider it urgent, convenient or conducive to the despatch of business.

**10. ALLOCATION OF SEATS AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND PANELS (Pages 41 - 46)**

**11. NOMINATIONS TO THE OFFICES OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

To consider and agree nominations to the Council meeting on 18 May 2026 for election to the offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council for the following municipal year, in accordance with the Constitution.

The Conservative Group has nominated Cllr Penny for election to the office of Chairman and Cllr Rickman to the office of Vice-Chairman.

The Liberal Democrat Group has nominated Cllr J Davies for election to the office of Chairman and Cllr Rackham to the office of Vice-Chairman.

As these positions are contested, secret ballots will be held at the Council meeting.

**12. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT**

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# Agenda Item 1

26 FEBRUARY 2026

## NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Thursday, 26 February 2026

\* Cllr John Sleep (Chairman)

\* Cllr Dave Penny (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
- \* Richard Frampton
- \* Allan Glass
- \* David Harrison
- \* Matthew Hartmann
- \* David Hawkins
- John Haywood
- \* Jeremy Heron
- \* Nigel Linford

### Councillors:

- \* Patrick Mballa
- \* Colm McCarthy
- \* David Millar
- \* Ian Murray
- \* Stephanie Osborne
- \* Alan O'Sullivan
- \* Adam Parker
- \* 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, Alan Bethune, Tim Guymer, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje, Karen Wardle and Matt Wisdom

### Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Brand, S Clarke, Haywood and Young.

## 62 MINUTES

### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2025, be confirmed.

**63 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

All Members of the Council had been granted the necessary dispensations to speak and vote on the Scheme of Members' Allowances, the annual budget and setting of the Council tax for 2026/27, considered at minute no 70, 71 and 72.

Cllr A Wade declared, for transparency purposes, his employment by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority, a precepting authority in respect of the overall level of Council tax, considered at minute no 72.

Cllr J Davies declared, for transparency purposes, his employment by a taxi operator, subject to the Licensing Fees and Charges 2026/27, considered at minute no 66.

**64 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reported on the civic engagements he had attended throughout the District and Hampshire as follows:

15 January

The Chairman had the honour of representing the district at the official opening ceremony by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal of the new SMART Centre South Coast Institute of Technology at Southampton Solent University.

18 January

The Chairman had attended an event at the Blue Apple Theatre in Winchester (part of the Minstead Trust), which had great performances from the large team of actors and singers with learning disabilities, who form part of the Hanger Farm Community Theatre group, based in Totton.

27 January

The Vice-Chairman had represented the district at the Mayor of Havant's Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration. The service was focused on "Bridging Generations" and led by Honorary Alderman Ms. Leah Turner. Cllr Penny reported that this provided a very moving account of life before, during and after the Holocaust.

29 January

The Chairman had visited Tools for Reliance, based in Netley Marsh, where he was given a tour of the facilities and had the opportunity to meet some of the volunteers. The organisation supported training facilities across Africa, as well as supplying tool kits for armed forces veterans retraining for jobs in the community.

2 February

The Leader and Chairman had attended the funeral with full military honours of the armed forces veteran Jim Justice. This was a very well supported event with many armed forces officers attending. A great service, and a special and well deserved send off.

The Chairman had also represented the district at the New Forest Disability AGM which was well supported by their volunteers, officers, and residents.

11 February

The Chairman had attended the East Hants Civic Day held at Treloar School and College. This was a massive development for 180 disabled young people providing sensory and educational development.

14 February

The official opening of Merceode Lodge Care Home in Marchwood, had been attended by the Chairman where he had the privilege of cutting the ribbon. A guided tour was provided by the Managing Director, Tim Buckley of the very impressive state-of-the-art complex.

21 February

The Chairman had attended the Town Mayor of New Milton's charity afternoon tea party, which raised vital funds for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance.

19 April - Civic Service

Finally, the Chairman reported he would be holding his Civic Service on Sunday, 19 April at 3pm at St Wins Church, Totton. He invited members to this important event and advised that an invitation would be sent out via email in the next week.

## **65 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no Leader's announcements.

## **66 LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES 2026/27**

Cllr J Davies declared, for transparency purposes his employment by a taxi operator.

Cllr Tungate introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting held on 9 January 2026. Cllr Reid seconded the motion.

### **RESOLVED:**

That Council:

1. Approved the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2026-27 as set out in Appendices 1 and 2; and
2. That the power to set the scale of fees and charges for Hackey Carriage and Private Hire Licensing, including to consider the objections made in respect of the proposed, fees, be delegated to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee.

## **67 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2026/27**

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 13 February 2026. Cllr O'Sullivan seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council approved:

1. the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29 including the Annual Treasury Management Investment Strategy for 2026/27 (and the remainder of 2025/26), and the Treasury Indicators contained within, as provided in Appendix 1 be approved; and
2. that authority is delegated to the Section 151 Officer, who in turn delegates to Hampshire County Council's Director of Corporate Operations, as agreed in the Service Level Agreement, to manage all Council investments and borrowing according to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement as appropriate.

**68 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2026/27**

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 13 February 2026. Cllr O'Sullivan seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Investment Strategy 2026/27 provided at Appendix 1, be approved.

**69 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026/27**

Cllr Cleary introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the HR Committee meeting held on 8 January 2026. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council approved:

1. the changes outlined to Bands 1 and 2 with effect from 1 April 2026; and
2. the Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

**70 REPORT OF CABINET - 4 FEBRUARY 2026****PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET****Item 1 – Corporate peer challenge feedback visit final report**

A councillor highlighted that there was a recommendation within the report was to consider ways to improve the scrutiny function. It was felt that improvements should be considered which would be for the benefit of residents and the future decisions made by the council. The Leader responded noting this comment.

**Item 2 – Local Plan Review – Approval of spatial options and policy direction document**

A councillor noted that at the Cabinet meeting, the Leader had implored residents and stakeholders to respond to the consultation. The residents of Fordingbridge, in particular, were keen to express their views, but had reported of experiencing

difficulties in completing the online consultation form. It was asked whether any additional support or communication could be provided to assist those who wanted to respond to the consultation in order to make their views known.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy acknowledged that the online form required an account to be created in order for comments to be submitted. It was possible to save the response, part way through and return to it at a later point. The Portfolio Holder reported he would pass this feedback to officers.

### **Item 3 – Draft New Forest creative and cultural framework**

A councillor welcomed the draft creative and cultural framework and congratulated officers on its production, recognising the hard work involved. It was noted that the work arising from the framework would need to take place in partnership with others and this was supported. It was recognised that there were good quality cultural organisations operating in the forest but that they needed monetary support. It was felt that a budget needed to be identified in order to assist in bringing cultural events to fruition.

One other member also expressed support for towards the draft framework and expressed the view that it would open up funding opportunities.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing reported he was pleased to see the approval of draft framework. He noted the comment regarding funding had been raised at the Cabinet meeting and responded to by the officer in attendance. He reported that the framework would help with simplifying the process in applying for funding and that it would benefit the residents of the New Forest.

## **PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

### **Item 6 – Financial Monitoring report (based on performance April – December 2025 inclusive)**

A councillor noted that the report cited a security incident which had occurred at Hardley depot and questioned whether there would be an opportunity to be given more detail at a future meeting. This was so members could be provided with some reassurance that measures had been put in place to mitigate against this happening again, including at other council depots and also recognising that there was a financial impact.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate reported that the incident was a great concern and confirmed that the security arrangements had been improved as well as measures to mitigate against the risk of a future recurrence.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendation. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A councillor welcomed the funding in respect of Eling Tide Mill. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate responded and hoped that working with the Town Council, there now was a long-term programme in place to ensure that it would remain as an operational Tide Mill.

**RESOLVED:**

That the General Fund Corporate Priority Reserve is increased by £1.296 million.

**Item 7 – Asset maintenance and replacement programme and General Fund capital programme 2026/27**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendation. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A councillor sought confirmation that the vehicle replacement programme included the vehicles required in order to deliver the roll-out of phase 3 of the waste service. Another member highlighted that there was a significant number of redundant vehicles being stored at Lymington Town Hall waiting to be auctioned off. It was felt that they were there for too long time and were an eyesore.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate responded to the points made and confirmed that the vehicle replacement programme had been developed to include all vehicles required for the new waste service. He also agreed that the redundant vehicles stored at the Lymington Town Hall should be managed as efficiently and effectively as possible.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Vehicle and Plant replacement programme be approved for a 2-year period, covering purchases due in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

**Item 8 – Capital Strategy 2026/27**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendation. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Capital Strategy 2026/27 be approved, including the adoption of the Minimum Revenue Payment (MRP) statement.

**Item 9 – Members' allowances – Scheme to apply from 1 April 2026**

The Leader introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the current scheme of members' allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2026.

**71 REPORT OF CABINET - 18 FEBRUARY 2026****PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no items resolved by Cabinet in this report.

**PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL****Item 1 – Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme 2026/27**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

The motion was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:

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

Voting against: None

Abstaining: None

The recommendations were carried, 43 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstaining.

**RESOLVED:**

1. that from 06 April 2026, an increase in dwelling rents of 4.8% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;
2. that from 06 April 2026, an increase in garage rents of 4.8% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level be agreed;
3. that from 06 April 2026, shared ownership property rents be increased in line with the applicable rent review provisions within each lease. For the eight properties held under leases allowing RPI+0.5%, an increase of 5.00% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level be agreed, for all properties which are subject to CPI+1% under the current model lease, an increase of 4.8% be agreed and the weekly rent of one property sold under previous legislation be agreed to increase by 4.8%;
4. that from 06 April 2026 Service Charges will continue to reflect actual charges;
5. that the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report, be agreed; and
6. that a Housing Capital Programme to 2028/29, as set out in Appendix 4 to the Cabinet report, be agreed.

**Item 2 – Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget 2026/27**

The Chairman used his discretion to allow the Leader of the Council and the leader of the opposition groups only to exceed the time limit for speeches, for making their budget speeches. He highlighted his intention to attempt to facilitate one budget debate on the recommendations from Cabinet and any single alternative proposal, also at his discretion. However, should more than one amendment be tabled, he indicated that these would be dealt with one at a time.

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and moved the recommendations as proposed in the report of the Cabinet dated 18 February 2025. She also made a statement on the budget, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group made a statement and moved an amendment in the form of an alternative budget. Cllr Millar seconded the amendment.

A copy of the alternative budget had been circulated to all Members and published as part of the supplementary council agenda. A copy of the statement made is attached to these minutes.

The Council debated the Cabinet's budget proposals together with the alternative budget.

The outcome of the recorded vote on the alternative budget was as follows:-

Voting for: Cllrs M Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Dowd, Harrison, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, Parker, Rackham, A Wade, M Wade and Woods

Voting against: Cllrs Adams, Alvey, Blunden, Cleary, Crisell, S Davies, Frampton, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Heron, Linford, Murray, O'Sullivan, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Reilly, Rickman, Rippon-Swaine, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, Ward

Abstaining: Cllr Armstrong, England and Richards

The alternative budget was lost, 14 in favour, 26 against, 3 abstaining.

The outcome of the recorded vote on the budget as outlined in the report of Cabinet, was as follows:

Voting for: Cllrs Adams, Alvey, Blunden, Cleary, Crisell, J Davies, S Davies, Dowd, Frampton, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Heron, Linford, Murray, O'Sullivan, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Reilly, Rickman, Rippon-Swaine, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, Ward

Voting against: Cllr M Clark, Cullen, Harrison, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, Parker, Rackham, A Wade, M Wade and Woods

Abstaining: Cllrs Armstrong, England and Richards

The substantive motion and budget as presented in the report of Cabinet was carried 28 in favour, 12 against, 3 abstaining.

**RESOLVED:**

1. the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and financial strategy, as set out in the Cabinet report and throughout appendices 1-3, be approved;
2. there is a General Fund Net Budget Requirement in 2026/27 of £26.630 million, as set out in appendices 5a - 5d to the Cabinet report;
3. the New Forest District Council Band D Council Tax for 2026/27 shall be £211.92 (paragraph 37 of the Cabinet report);

4. the General Fund Capital Programme for 2026/27 of £14.646 million, as set out in appendix 6 to the Cabinet report be approved; and
5. the proposed fees and charges as included at appendix 7 to the Cabinet report be approved.

**Item 3 – Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan – Making the Plan (Referendum and Decision on Adoption)**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A number of councillors spoke in support of the adoption of Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan, recognising that the referendum turn-out rate had been positive. Members highlighted that the adoption of the Plan would enable the Town Council to receive additional CIL funding which would be of benefit to the local area and to local residents.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the outcome of the referendum of 29 January 2026 be noted; and
2. That the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan be ‘made’ (adopted) as part of the Development Plan for New Forest District (Outside the National Park).

**72 THE 2026/27 COUNCIL TAX**

All Members of the Council had been granted dispensations to speak and vote on this item.

Cllr A Wade declared, for transparency purposes, his employment by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority, a precepting authority in respect of the overall level of Council tax.

The Council considered the Council Tax for 2026/27.

The Portfolio Holder Finance and Corporate moved the recommendations in the report. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

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

Voting for: Cllrs Adams, Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, M Clark, Cleary, Crisell, Cullen, S Davies, Dowd, England, Frampton, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Heron, Linford, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Murray, Osborne, O’Sullivan, Parker, Penman, Penny, Poole, Rackham, Reid, Reilly, Richards, Rickman, Rippon-Swaine, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, A Wade, M Wade, Ward and Woods

Voting against: None

Abstaining: Cllr J Davies and Harrison

The recommendations were carried, 41 in favour, 0 against, 2 abstaining.

**RESOLVED:**

The Council resolved the following:

1. That it be noted that on 3 December 2025 the Council calculated the Council Tax Base for the year 2026/27, as set out in paragraph 19 of the Council report;
2. To calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2026/27 (excluding Parish Precepts) is £15,746,890;
3. That the amounts be calculated for the year 2026/27 in accordance with Sections 31A, 31B and 34 to 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, as set out in paragraph 21 of the Council report;
4. That it be noted that Hampshire County Council (including Adult Social Care), the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire and Isle of Wight and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service have issued precepts for 2026/27 to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council's areas as set out in paragraph 22 of the Council report;
5. That the Section 151 Officer be given delegated authority to implement any variation to the overall level of Council Tax arising from the final notification of the Hampshire County Council precept; and
6. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at paragraph 21(h) and 22, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011), hereby sets the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2026/27 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings, as set out in paragraph 24 of the Council report.

**73 QUESTIONS**

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

- From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the food waste collection service for phase 3 residents.
- From Cllr M Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on the number of conservation officers.
- From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on flooding risk and mitigation.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on assisted collection for the new waste collection service.
- From Cllr Haywood to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on neighbourhood plan policies.
- From Cllr M Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Hythe Pier repairs.
- From Cllr Haywood to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on vermin infestations.

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

**74 APPOINTMENT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES - REPORT OF THE MEMBER APPOINTMENT PANEL**

The Leader of the Council moved the recommendation in the report. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That Sophie Sajic be appointed Strategic Director, Housing and Communities.

**75 AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION - PROCEDURE FOR REMOVING AND REPLACING THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Cllr S Davies introduced the item and moved the recommendations. Cllr M Wade seconded the motion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the amendments to Chapter 4/5 (Procedure for Removing and Replacing the Leader of the Council) (Appendix 1) be approved which:

1. Removes the automatic trigger, following a change in political balance; and
2. Clarifies the provisions for bringing forward a motion to remove the Leader, inclusive of a new threshold of at least one third of the total number of council members.

**76 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

There were no changes.

CHAIRMAN

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## Leader Budget Speech 2026/27

I am delighted to present the Council's balanced budget for 2026/27. Once again it is a budget that continues to invest in our services, invest in our assets, invest in our people and invest in our place.

At the highest level, it is a general fund revenue budget set at twenty six point six million pounds, and a general fund capital programme totalling fourteen point seven million pounds.

At a time when local government finances are tighter than ever, especially following on from what has turned out to be a rather unfair funding review by the current government, I am proud to be able to confirm that no frontline or back-office services will be reduced for the year ahead. We have produced a fully funded balanced budget that gives us an excellent platform to tackle the difficult medium term position current being forecast.

In our budget, Councillors will note the additional two million pounds put into our new waste collection service. We have demonstrated the Council's values perfectly in this roll out, demonstrating Learning as we entered into phase 2 and now phase 3, Empathy, as we have listened to our residents and offered additional support where required, Ambition is clear with this being the single largest service change that I can ever recall for this Council, and Fairness, especially for our hard working crews who no longer have to worry every time they grab a bin bag that something sharp or heavy might cause them an injury.

We have listened to what our residents have told us, and through our transformation and ICT work programme have improved self-service functionality so our customers can carry out transactions at a time that suits them.

We have increased the coastal maintenance budget for 2026/27 by seventy seven thousand pounds to a total of four hundred thousand pounds so we can continue to be a responsible local authority and seek to do all we can to protect our stunning coastline from the continued threats of coastal erosion and climate change. We must fully recognise however that we simply can't do this alone. We will keep up engagement with the Environment Agency who will need to play a significant role in funding the multi-million pounds required over the more medium-long term.

An additional sixty one thousand pounds has gone into toilet cleaning. Yes, it's not glamorous or headline grabbing, but couple this with the two million over the next two years in our capital programme for toilet renovations, it's another great example of prioritising our resources in projects and services that will be of real benefit to the largest proportion of our residents and visitors alike.

We are investing nearly three million pounds next year in replacement vehicles critical to frontend service delivery, and have half a million pounds set aside next year for necessary improvement and maintenance works to the historically important

Eling Tide Mill. A report will also be coming forward to the Council in the early summer to set out our intentions around the delivery of strategic CIL projects. When combined with our annual infrastructure programme, habitat mitigation schemes and budget set aside for Arts and Culture projects, we have over twenty million pounds of projects funded through CIL within our three year capital programme. We care about the place that is the new forest, and want to see money that has been collected here, spent here.

We have also invested in our biggest asset, our staff who do such a brilliant job at providing the front end of customer interaction and satisfaction, and just as importantly, we can't forget the range of staff who provide the often unseen functions that simply keep us going. In line with the People Strategy, this budget is supporting the Digital Skills for All Programme launching this year, and we have increased the training budget for our staff to ensure they remain as well prepared as they can be to take the essence and culture of the New Forest into the new Council, post April 2028.

A clear priority of ours is also to try and keep council tax increases as low as possible. We have done our bit and have imposed by far the lowest Council Tax percentage increase of all the precepting authorities on the Council Tax bill. It's easy to forget that this council's council tax share only equates to around nine per cent of the overall bill. We play an important role in collecting the council tax for the County Council, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Police and Crime Commissioner, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue service, and the Town and Parish Councils. Our share for the year at two hundred and eleven pounds and ninety two pence for a band D property continues to represent excellent value for money at just four pounds per week.

Outside of the General Fund, our Housing Revenue Account, funded in the main through Housing Rents, is also balanced, and will spend in excess of nineteen million pounds next year on improving and maintaining the five thousand two hundred and fifty homes that we own.

The opposition will claim that we should be doing more, that we must take the opportunity to spend more whilst we can. Let me tell you, we are doing absolutely everything we can to prioritise our resources and our spend to where it is needed the most on the services that this Council has responsibility for. The budget is in accordance with priorities that have been collectively set by all members of this chamber.

And, even with Local Government Reorganisation around the corner, the residents of the New Forest will still need a responsible and financially sustainable local authority beyond March twenty twenty-eight. That is what you get with a budget set by a Conservative administration.

I'm extremely thankful to my Cabinet, to the members who have supported them, and to our officers for getting us to this position.

Chairman, I fully endorse the recommendations as laid out in the report of the Cabinet.

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## **Liberal Democrat Alternative Budget Speech 2026/27**

Chairman, Members, this is the last budget in which NFDC has total control, it is the last budget we can make a difference for our residents before the Shadow Authority exerts its legal control over our finances. It is our final opportunity to leave a practical, positive legacy for our residents, the old, the young, the vulnerable, and our local businesses. These are not in place of the administration's budget. They are targeted, affordable additions designed to improve quality of life across the District aligned to our Corporate Plan.

Our New Forest District contains some of the least privileged parts of Hampshire. 22.1% of New Forest School children are on Free school meals, and many will be disadvantaged, which impacts academic outcomes. The New Forest district is higher than the Hampshire average (20.7%) and the South East (20.6%). Since 2021, that figure has risen by 5.9%. There are now 4,512 children in poverty in our district — 266 more than last year when the LibDems also called for targeted help and you did nothing..

That is one in five New Forest school age children live in poverty, one in five!

Alongside this we see rising school exclusions, increasing suspensions, and more referrals to Hampshire Children's Services, with more children entering care. This is the trajectory of our district and it demands our attention. In our Corporate Plan that prioritises People, Place and Prosperity in Priority 1 in the People section "Helping those in our community with the greatest need". If this description does not fit as some of our most vulnerable residents, who does it fit?

Therefore, the Liberal Democrats propose working with New Forest Local Children's Partnership, and Hampshire County Council to support sustainable programmes for families.

Hampshire County Council have confirmed there are plans to roll out Best Start hubs in the New Forest, it will likely be in the second or third phase, so probably the summer. The teams are reviewing the data in line with the DfE requirements.

There is a significant opportunity to enhance District services by integrating Housing Support, into the New Forest Best Start Hub. By embedding these services on a sustainable and long-term basis, the hub can provide holistic assistance to families and individuals in need, addressing multiple aspects of wellbeing and stability within our community. This £500,000 start-up funding will be dedicated to supporting the establishment and early operations of the Best Start Hub, ensuring that vital services like Housing Support are accessible for families from the outset and can be sustained for the future to help the children of our district ad revers that trend.

Our support for the young is to set up of more youth hubs, with a focus on school holidays, providing meal and activity funding throughout the District. £50,000 would be for ongoing to support provided for the youth of our district.

This is delivering for young through early intervention, it is not just morally right but it reduces long-term financial and social costs for the whole community as well.

But although the children of our district are our future, the current adult population also need our help.

Corporate Plan People Priority 2 “Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives

Almost a third of our residents - 31.7% - are over 65, and 5.2% are over 85. The retired community tend to have greatest need of public transport and are the biggest users of hospital services - and yet many communities have no direct public transport to Southampton or Lymington hospitals. So, we propose working in partnership with Town and Parish Councils to change that situation. This Council would purchase and forward fund for 12 months a “Health Bus” to Lymington/Southampton hospitals. Seed capital of 120,000 for the purchase of a bus and 12 months supporting revenue budget by NFDC, subject to being revenue funded by town and parishes thereafter.

Our residents have also faced rising prices for energy and fuel. Our GP practices tell us that cold weather increases chest infections, blood pressure and risks of heart attack and stroke, particularly for our most vulnerable residents.

We propose a £1 million capital Warm Spaces Grant Programme, delivered in partnership with Town and Parish Councils, to create additional community spaces that are energy-efficient and can be used as warm hubs for the community, in addition ensure NFDC community facilities also provide warm space areas where appropriate.

This is preventative public health policy, modest borrowing with measurable social return This one-off capital grant will not just benefit the old but also the vulnerable and those who have trouble warming their homes

Corporate Plan Prosperity Priority 2 “Supporting our high-quality business base and economic centres to thrive and grow”. We know that the engine driving life in the New Forest is employment, and across our unique landscape many of the business are based in the heart of our communities, particularly on our high streets. Our towns and villages depend on small businesses providing vital products and services for residents, a place to meet, and for many, the first taste of employment

Liberal Democrats propose the introduction of extended business rate relief to encourage businesses to purchase and use empty shops in our communities thus supporting local employment/economy. This ongoing revenue support of £100,000 will help grow and sustain the small businesses in our towns and villages, the bedrock of the local economy

A commissioned review into the economic impact of town centre car parking charges, forming a future Parking Strategy ahead of Local Government Reorganisation. We need evidence-based policy to protect the sustainability of our town centres.

The Liberal Democrats are a party who put people first, but we are also fiscally responsible. £770,000 from Corporate Priorities reserve instead of using that for the

Public Convenience refurbishment, which is then covered by the capital allocation to Public Conveniences. The ongoing £150,000 does not negatively affect the Medium Term Financial Plan and £1 million capital expenditure for the warm places is a sum worth borrowing for the positive impact on New Forest residents and compared to our existing £132.9 million debt this extra £1million would not realistically effect the overall financial situation.

With reference to the risk assessment Uncertainty exists in every budget cycle. The Administration's own papers acknowledge short- and medium-term uncertainty in reference to the current budget. That cannot be a reason for inaction.

The key point from our 151 officer is, I quote, "It is the view of the Council's Section 151 Officer that the changes as proposed are not of material consequence to the section 25 statement as included within the substantive proposed budget report"

These additions align fully with the Corporate Plan. They do not disrupt the Administration's budget. They strengthen it. They are innovative, constructive and fiscally sound.

They support children in poverty, provide access to healthcare for older residents, protect vulnerable households from cold, and help our town centres thrive.

This is our final opportunity to act before control passes to the Shadow Authority. It is our final opportunity to show our residents that we have their interests at heart. It is our final opportunity to invest in the New Forest for the benefit of our taxpayers before our finances become controlled from outside of this District.

Let us leave a positive legacy.

Please support these recommendations.

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## Council – 26 February 2026

### Questions Under Standing Order 22

#### **First Questions**

##### **Question 1**

##### **From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden**

We have been informed that the Wheelie bin roll out for Phase 3 has been delayed until May 2026 due to wheelie bin manufacturing schedules. Does this include a delay to the food waste collection?

*Reply:*

Yes.

Note: This question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr Brand.

##### **Question 2**

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

How many conservation officers did we have five years ago and how many now?

*Reply:*

*Five years ago, there were two conservation officers in post. Today, we continue to have two conservation officers.*

##### **Question 3**

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

Storm Chandra struck on 26 January, and since then sustained rainfall has left many parts of our district flooded, roads impassable, farmland waterlogged and businesses disrupted. In Fordingbridge, residents have again experienced how vulnerable the town is to prolonged rainfall – for many, this is the fourth or fifth ‘100 year event’ they have lived through in the last 25 years.

At the Local Plan meeting on Friday 13th, around 250 residents braved the conditions hoping to gain assurance as to how this council's potential allocation of almost 3,000 new homes in and around Fordingbridge would avoid worsening flood risk and bringing more infrastructure pressure.

Given the very real concerns raised by residents, can you confirm that the Council will:

1. Ensure that flood mitigation and infrastructure are designed and delivered in advance of or alongside any future development;
2. Take the lead on identifying projects which will mitigate the impact of building on farmland and flood plains across the Avon valley; and
3. Use NFDC's strategic Community Infrastructure Levy to guarantee that existing and future residents of Fordingbridge are not left living in demonstrably worse conditions just so that this Council might meet Government housing targets?

*Reply:*

*Let me assure you that the Local Plan does take flood risk and infrastructure capacity extremely seriously.*

*I can confirm that any future development would only proceed where robust flood mitigation is designed into schemes from the outset and delivered in step with the development. This is a requirement of national policy, and it will be a clear expectation in our plan-making.*

*We are already working with partners such as the Environment Agency and Hampshire County Council to understand what wider mitigation projects are needed across the Avon Valley.*

*Part of the Local plan process is to identify those strategic measures and the council will play a key role in coordinating that work. Regarding infrastructure funding, the Community Infrastructure Levy is one of the main funding streams to support areas experiencing growth.*

*As the local plan progresses, we will ensure that the needs of Fordingbridge are properly considered when CIL is prioritised. At this stage, no decisions have been made on the strategic allocations for the local plan.*

#### **Question 4**

##### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden**

Please can you confirm in the Phase 3 area how many properties have requested assisted collections for the new waste collection service, and what per cent have we rejected? And, what consideration are we giving to Resident challenges on medical waste additional requirements?

*Reply:*

*In January our 'Get Ready' leaflets were posted out to 36,000 households in the phase 3 area, and by 24th February, there were 63 applications for assisted collections received. All of these have been accepted as the applicants met the requirements.*

*Regarding medical waste requirements, our collection policy is clear that additional waste capacity can be made available in this situation. Members of the public can request this larger capacity online, or by calling our customer service team.*

In response to a supplemental question, seeking clarification whether there was a deadline for submission of assisted collection requests, the Portfolio Holder reported that it was an ongoing process and therefore there was no deadline.

#### **Question 5**

##### **From Cllr John Haywood to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp**

A number of parishes in the district now have Neighbourhood Plans. Neighbourhood Plans represent the end point of years of effort, a large part of it done by volunteers. People who are passionate about their area freely give their time to shape its development at a very local level, supported by planning professionals.

Neighbourhood plans are the only part of the district's local plan that have a direct democratic basis through a local referendum, and once made, they become an integral part of the local plan itself. Congratulations by the way to Lymington and Pennington for the clear "Yes" in their Neighbourhood Plan referendum.

In Ringwood we are becoming frustrated by the number of times that neighbourhood plan policies are being over-ridden by this council in planning decisions.

Can I ask the portfolio holder: in how many planning decisions have neighbourhood plan policies been over-ridden by this council in the past year?

*Reply:*

*Six planning applications have been considered by the Planning Committee since January 2025 where a conflict with a Neighbourhood Plan has been identified. Despite these occasional conflicts, the Neighbourhood Plans still have influence over development in many ways.*

*A Neighbourhood Plan, once adopted, becomes part of the Council's overall Development Plan, along with the Local Plan and the Hampshire County Council Mineral and Waste Plan.*

*These plans contain many policies and some of these may, on occasions conflict with one another. In that case on an individual application, it is up to the decision maker, such as the Planning Committee, to weigh up the relevant policies and decide where the balance lies. In other words, to make a planning judgment.*

*Finally, I would like to confirm that the Council welcomes the production of Neighbourhood Plans, and we will continue to assist local planning groups to prepare sound plans. I too would like to congratulate Lymington and Pennington on the successful referendum on their plan.*

Note: This question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr Haywood.

## **Second questions**

### **Question 6**

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

Can the Council consider issuing a Section 48 Notice to the Owner of the Hythe Pier to effect immediate repairs to the structure given the Ferry business is now up for sale and the public would wish to see the return of the Ferry service to a sound and safe landing stage?

*Reply:*

*Thank you, Councillor Clark, for your question.*

*Under the Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Act 1990 legislation, a Section 48 Repairs Notice can only require works that are reasonably necessary for the proper preservation of the listed structure. If the repairs in question relate to the pontoon rather than the listed pier structure, it is doubtful as to whether the Council could legally serve such a notice.*

*If you would like to explore the matter further, particularly in terms of what is or is not included within the listing and what powers may be available, I would encourage you to speak directly with our conservation officers, who will be happy to advise.*

In response to a supplemental question, where Cllr Clark clarified that the concern related to the pier, rather than the pontoon, and that electrical issues on the pier work was preventing residents from accessing to the inscribed boards of their loved ones and whether anything could be done given its Grade II listed status, the Portfolio Holder reported that he would pass this matter onto the Conservation Officer to consider.

### **Question 7**

#### **From Cllr John Haywood to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden**

A number of residents have approached me with concerns about vermin infestations in their gardens and homes being caused by the council's new food waste collection service.

Can I ask the portfolio holder if the council has seen an increase in reports of vermin across the district since the roll-out, and if any investigations into the impact of the new food waste collection service on vermin infestations have been made?

*Reply:*

*The council has no evidence that there is an increase in vermin infestations being caused by food waste collections. In fact, reports to the Council's own pest control service have fallen by 130 cases in the last year, as the caddies have clearly contributed to more secure way of storing food waste than the plastic bags previously used, with reports of street litter on collection days almost eradicated.*

Note: This question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr Haywood.

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New Forest District Council  
Appletree Court  
Beaulieu Road  
Lyndhurst  
Hampshire  
SO43 7PA

## PETITION for FULL COUNCIL DEBATE

### *Protecting the Integrity of the New Forest District*

01<sup>st</sup> April 2026

**On behalf of the 5,350 individuals (and rising)** who have signed this petition at the time of submission, we respectfully submit the following case for debate at Full Council. These residents are asking NFDC to **act urgently, decisively, and in the best interests of the communities you serve.**

**As elected councillors, your duty is to represent the public.** Your own consultation, together with this petition, shows an **overwhelming and consistent message** from local people. **We are asking you to honour that democratic responsibility and act on our behalf.**

### **Our Clear, Constructive Plan**

We are calling on New Forest District Council to take two immediate steps:

#### **1. Seek a formal Counsel Opinion**

NFDC should urgently instruct a specialist public-law barrister to review the process, the criteria and the consultation evidence to determine whether there are solid grounds for legal challenge. This work could be carried out in collaboration with Test Valley Borough Council, who are also at risk of seeing parts of their area absorbed into Southampton. A joint approach would strengthen the case, share expertise and demonstrate unified local opposition. This is a standard, responsible step for any council facing a decision of this scale.

Seeking a formal Counsel's Opinion is a logical, proportionate and relatively inexpensive first step. It does not commit NFDC to legal action, it simply allows a specialist public-law barrister to assess whether the Government's decision-making process meets the required standards. This is the safest and most responsible way for the Council to 'test the waters' before considering a Judicial Review. It ensures that any further action is grounded in expert advice, shared evidence, and a clear understanding of the legal position.

#### **2. Pursue a Judicial Review if the Counsel Opinion confirms there are grounds**

If the legal advice supports it, NFDC must act swiftly and pursue a Judicial Review to contest the break-up of the New Forest District. The window to act is extremely short. Once the proposals move to the next stage, reversing them becomes far harder.

## The Issue

The New Forest is more than a place on a map; it is our home, our community, and a defining part of our identity. For generations, its landscape, culture and way of life have shaped who we are. Yet today, the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) plans threaten to break the New Forest apart.

Under these proposals, large parts of our community would be forced into a new, urban-centred authority dominated by Southampton. This ignores the character, needs and values of the New Forest and contradicts the Government's own criteria for reorganisation, which state that existing district and borough authorities should form the building blocks of any new councils, and that local community cohesion must be of utmost importance. Instead of respecting that principle, the New Forest is being carved up.

What makes this even more unacceptable is that 97% of residents who responded to the public consultation opposed this break-up. Their voices have been ignored by the government on a decision that will reshape our home for generations.

## Why This Matters Legally

We believe there is a credible legal basis for challenging the decision. The Government's own criteria have not been met, the consultation results showing overwhelming opposition were disregarded, and the decision-making process appears inconsistent with the principles the Government itself set out.

Some have pointed to Christchurch's unsuccessful challenge during the BCP merger, but the comparison is flawed. Christchurch was merged into a single authority in its entirety. The New Forest is being split apart, which was not proposed under the Government's criteria. This is a materially different situation.

## A United Community

Local government reorganisation may be coming, but that does not mean our communities must be torn apart. The New Forest deserves to remain whole. Our shared history, our identity and the bonds that make this place our home must be respected. It is time for our centuries-old community to stand together and say clearly: **we will not be broken apart.**

**On behalf of the 5,350 residents who have signed this petition (to date), and the many more joining each day, we ask NFDC to take the actions outlined above.**

Thank you for your consideration.



**James Hartley-Binns**



**Emily Hartley-Binns**

*Campaign Coordinators - New Forest Together*

**Council – 13 April 2026**

**Report of Cabinet – [4 March 2026](#)**

## **Part I – Items Resolved by Cabinet**

### **1. Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028**

**Portfolio** – Community, Safety and Wellbeing

#### **Cabinet Resolution:**

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the findings of the public consultation conducted on the NFDC Domestic Abuse Strategy; and
2. Approved the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028.

#### **Cabinet Discussion:**

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing introduced the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028. He reflected that Domestic Abuse is one of the most harmful crimes in society with far reaching and long-lasting consequences for both adults and children. Growing up in a household with fear and intimidation can impact on health, wellbeing and development with lasting effects into adulthood.

In the New Forest there were both statutory and voluntary services working to support those affected by domestic abuse. In conjunction with the Domestic Abuse partnership, the approach strengthens and coordinates with commissioned services, to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse have access to the best and most appropriate support. This was whilst also delivering a range of perpetrator programmes aimed at encouraging healthy non abusive relationships.

It was highlighted that an estimated 2.3 million people aged 16 and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023 in England and Wales. Domestic abuse could affect anyone regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. The importance of home being a safe space to live and relax was recognised and that for too many, home was not like this due to domestic abuse.

The Portfolio Holder reported that no single organisation held the key to take effective action against domestic abuse and that domestic abuse was everyone's responsibility. The Strategy proposed to build on the work already undertaken in the district, through effective partnership arrangements, including New Forest Domestic Abuse Forum and the Hampshire Domestic Abuse Partnership,

The Service Manager – Community Safety & Support reported that the Strategy had undergone a public consultation exercise, and whilst it was recognised there had been a low response rate, it was highlighted that 33% of respondents were victims of domestic abuse. 94% of all respondents agreed with the priorities within the strategy.

Several non-Cabinet members expressed their support for the Domestic Abuse Strategy. It was recognised that domestic abuse was a national problem, often under reported and that there could be difficulty in victims trusting the reporting process. It was recognised that trust needed to be built at a grassroots level. Non-Cabinet members also highlighted the difficulties in engagement in the strategy and that 18 consultation responses had been received in relation to the draft Strategy. It was highlighted that the report stated there were 7,000 victims of domestic abuse in the New Forest and that the reasons and causes of domestic abuse should be considered and addressed.

The Service Manager – Community Safety and Support responded to the points made, highlighting that the district council was in a good position, with the Domestic Abuse Forum to consider this at a strategic level with representation from both the statutory and voluntary sector. A priority within the strategy was to raise awareness and this would include the provision of training both for staff and for partners which could lead to earlier intervention. It was further highlighted that on average victims suffered 34 incidents of domestic abuse before attempting to step away from the perpetrator. It was therefore necessary to ensure that victims had the right support to services at the right time, whilst recognising the need to tailor this to the individual.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, highlighted that the telephone number to report domestic abuse had previously been on the waste and recycling sacks provided by the district council and questioned with the move to wheeled bins, how this key messaging was being made available. In response, it was highlighted that communication was a key area and that messaging was carried out in a variety of ways, including targeted SMS messaging in under reported areas, using posters in public conveniences, through council and partner services as well as through the licensed trade with the 'Ask

Angela' campaign. The approach to consider new opportunities to encourage victims to access support to services was continually reviewed.

Finally, a non-Cabinet Member raised the issue of training recognising that staff were to receive training on this matter, and it was suggested that members also receive training in order to help them raise awareness, identify domestic abuse and how to report it.

## **2. Housing Landlord Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy**

**Portfolio** – Housing and Homelessness

### **Cabinet Resolution:**

That Cabinet approved the Housing Landlord Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy 2026-29.

### **Cabinet Discussion:**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and the Housing Landlord Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy, highlighting that it set out four key priorities; putting tenants first, prevention and early intervention, managing risk and supporting victims and work in partnership. This had been developed as the Regulator of Social Housing required all social housing landlords to have a policy on ASB.

The Service Manager Housing Resident Services reported that following a public consultation exercise on the draft Strategy and reviewing the comments received several changes had been made to the strategy. This was around a shift in the language used to reduce stigma, a commitment to share positive outcomes through mediation, community led improvements and enforcement action, working on strengthening interdepartmental collaboration, through agreed protocols with for example CCTV, enforcement and community safety. It also had clarified the direction of travel with the estates management team with specialist support in relation to neighbourhood and ASB issues and also working in partnership with the Safer New Forest Partnership in relation to youth service provision.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, expressed his support on the Strategy and highlighted that reports of anti-social behaviour to him had been increasing and spoke of the importance of prevention and early intervention.

A few non-Cabinet members expressed their support to the Strategy. However, concerns were raised that the Strategy had been written as a housing landlord and putting tenants in first. It was recognised that often social housing tenants lived in a community in areas with a mix of privately owned properties as well as in properties from other social housing providers and therefore it was important to recognise this. Social housing tenants did not live in isolation and that it was a problem for the local community. It was felt that a more holistic approach be used and that this should be strengthened. It was also felt that the messaging on the strategy be considered. A priority of the strategy was putting tenants first and it was suggested that neighbourhoods be put first.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness confirmed that the strategy had been developed to meet the requirements of the social housing regulator. The Service Manager for Housing Resident Services further clarified that a key priority of the Strategy was working in partnership with others, in particular the community safety team which would look at the wider neighbourhood.

### **3. Draft Revised Allocations Policy**

**Portfolio:** Housing and Homelessness

**Cabinet Resolution:**

That Cabinet approved the revised draft Housing Allocations Policy (Appendix 1) for statutory public consultation.

**Cabinet Discussion:**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and the revised draft Housing Allocations Policy. In doing so, he highlighted that the current policy had been previously adopted in 2020. This had introduced a significant change to the approach and priorities around housing, focusing on housing need, rather than want, combined with the length of time someone had been on the housing register. The allocations policy was a significant and statutory policy document for the council in terms of its effects on the community and approval was sought to commence consultation on the revision. No change was proposed to the four needs bands of housing priority.

### **4. Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031**

**Portfolio:** Housing and Homelessness

### **Cabinet Resolution:**

That Cabinet approved the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for public consultation.

### **Cabinet Discussion:**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which was recommended for Cabinet approval for public consultation. He highlighted that the Strategy needed to be reviewed at least every five years.

The Service Manager Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts reported that the Strategy was a statutory requirement and had been drafted following a comprehensive review carried out last year. This included engagement with partners, service users and staff. The Strategy set out five priorities to prevent and relieve homelessness, end rough sleeping, invest in accommodation, provide support and to work in partnership. There was a greater focus on better awareness and reducing the reliance on emergency accommodation. It was highlighted that the strategy aligned to the current Corporate Plan, particularly in supporting vulnerable residents and improving housing outcomes.

Several non-Cabinet members expressed their support for the draft Strategy. These members recognised that often there were problems, prior to homelessness crisis and of the importance of homelessness prevention. It was recognised that it was a difficult and complex problem which required detailed local knowledge, working with landlords and partners. Early intervention was therefore important. Wider issues such as children living in poverty in the New Forest in receipt of free school meals were highlighted and the need for a more holistic approach to address the causes of social issues at source.

The Portfolio Holder responded to the points made, supporting the importance of preventing homelessness and of the positive efforts of the housing team. He also recognised with the prospect of LGR and a new unitary authority this gave an opportunity for more joined up working.

## **Part II –**

### **There were no items with recommendations to Council**

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**Council – 13 April 2026**

## **Allocation of seats and appointments to committees and panels**

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Purpose                     | For Decision  |
| Classification              | Public  |
| Executive Summary           | <p>Following a recent change to the membership of the Conservative group from 25 members to 24 and the formation of a Reform UK Group of two members, it is necessary to review the representation of political groups on committees and panels.</p> <p>Having regard to the current number of Members on the Council and applying the necessary principles of proportionality in order, the council is required to consider changes to the Council’s previously agreed position. Those changes are being considered by Group Leaders and proposals will be reported in advance of the Council meeting.</p> |
| <b>Recommendations</b>      | <p><b>That the Council:-</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. considers the allocation of seats to committees and panels in accordance with the principles set out in the report, and in doing so, agrees to the allocation set out in the table in Appendix 1 (to follow); and</b></li> <li><b>2. appoints councillors to individual committees and panels, as identified in Appendix 2 (to follow), for the remainder of the four year period ending May 2027.</b></li> </ol>   |
| Reasons for recommendations | To comply with the provisions of Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, relating to the duty to allocate seats to political groups, following a division on the Council.  |
| Wards                       | All   |
| Portfolio Holder            | Councillor Jill Cleary, Leader  |

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Strategic Director | Kate Ryan, Chief Executive   |
| Officer Contacts   | <p>Karen Wardle<br/>Principal Democratic Services Officer<br/>023 8028 5071<br/><a href="mailto:Karen.wardle@nfdc.gov.uk">Karen.wardle@nfdc.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Matt Wisdom<br/>Assistant Director – Strategy and Engagement<br/>(Monitoring Officer)<br/>023 8028 5072<br/><a href="mailto:Matt.wisdom@nfdc.gov.uk">Matt.wisdom@nfdc.gov.uk</a></p> |

### **Introduction and background**

1. In accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, it is necessary to review the representation of political groups on committees, whenever there is a division on the Council. This review is necessitated by a change to the membership of the Conservative Group. For this purpose, “committees” includes the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Panels but excludes the Cabinet.
2. There are four statutory principles of political balance which have to be applied in filling appointments to committees. These are contained in Section 15(5) of the Act.
3. The principles that have to be applied are as follows:-
  - (a) that not all seats on the body are allocated to the same political group;
  - (b) that the majority of the seats on the body are allocated to a particular political group if the number of persons belonging to that group are a majority of the Authority’s membership;
  - (c) subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, that the number of seats on the ordinary committees of a relevant Authority which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the total of all the seats on the ordinary committees of that Authority as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the Authority; and
  - (d) subject to paragraphs (a) to (c) above, that the number of seats on the body which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the same number of all seats on that body as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the Authority.

4. Once the Council has determined the allocation of committee places between the political groups, the Council must then appoint the nominees of the political groups to the committees.
5. Those members who are not members of political groups have no legal entitlement to an allocation of seats on committees. However, once the political groups' entitlement has been reached, any remaining seats may be filled by members not belonging to a political group. Such Members are classed as being non-aligned. The Council's Constitution makes provision for non-aligned Members to be allocated committee and panel places as nearly as possible in proportion to the number of those Members on the Council.
6. These provisions need not be applied if a different position is agreed without any member of the authority voting against.
7. It should be noted that, although the legislative position refers to "political" groups, this also includes the Independent Group. Although not affiliated with a political party, the Independent Group have formed a group in accordance with the legislation.

### **Current position**

8. The political balance of the Council now stands as follows:-

|  |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|
| Conservative Group                       | 24       | (50.00%) |
| Liberal Democrat Group                   | 14       | (29.17%) |
| Independent Group                        | 4        | (8.33%)  |
| Green Group                              | 2        | (4.17%)  |
| Reform UK Group                          | 2        | (4.17%)  |
| Labour and Co-operative<br>(Non-aligned) | 1        |          |
| Non-aligned                              | 1        |          |
| <hr/> Total                              | <hr/> 48 |          |

### **Appointments to committees and panels**

9. There are currently 84 seats to which appointments should be made under the principles of proportionality.

10. The application of the percentages outlined at paragraph 8 provides for the following allocation of seats to political groups across the overall Council position:-

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Conservative Group     | 42 |
| Liberal Democrat Group | 25 |
| Independent Group      | 7  |
| Green Group            | 4  |
| Reform UK Group        | 4  |
| Unallocated            | 2  |
| <hr/>                  |    |
| Total                  | 84 |

11. Having regard to the overall position outlined at paragraph 10, the application of the percentages outlined at paragraph 8 requires the rounding up or down of calculated figures to give whole numbers on committees. The Council should, as far as practicable, ensure fairness on each committee, including across the wider allocation in making these adjustments, whilst taking into account the proportionality rules in their stated order, as far as practicable.
12. This change to the political balance means that the Conservative group should have 50% of the total number of seats, and 50% of the seats on each committee and panel. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to amend the size of the committees and panels so that they are an even number. One option, to keep the total number of seats available for allocation at 84, is to increase or decrease the size of each committee and panel by one member.
13. The final recommended allocations will be circulated as Appendix 1 in advance of the Council meeting, once the political groups have had the opportunity to review the implications above.
14. At the last review undertaken in December 2025, the Council also resolved to allocate two seats to the two of the three non-aligned Members, on the Appeals Committee and the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The Council's Constitution makes provision for the allocation of seats to Members who are not members of a political group, as nearly as possible in proportion to the number of those members on the Council. It is now the case that there are two non-aligned members and there are two seats which can be allocated to them, having first complied with the legislative principles for the allocation of seats.

15. The nominees of the political groups to the committees and panels will be circulated to follow at Appendix 2. It should be noted that if Members seek to make any amendments, this may affect the calculations and subsequently the nominees.

### **Corporate plan priorities**

16. The recommendations support the Council in delivering all corporate plan priorities by maintaining the Council's ability to function as a collective body in accordance with relevant legislation.

### **Options appraisal**

17. The recommendations within this report satisfies the proportionality requirements and can be achieved in line with the current decision making structure of a total of 84 seats. There is however a requirement to change to the number of members on each of the committees and panels.
18. The Council can choose to agree an alternative allocation that does not satisfy the proportionality requirements, providing that this is agreed without a single Member of the Council voting against.

### **Consultation undertaken**

19. Consultation has been undertaken with the Council's Statutory Officers, the Portfolio Holder (Leader) and all other Group Leaders.

### **Financial and resource implications**

20. There are no financial or resourcing implications arising specifically from this report.

### **Legal implications**

21. The proportionality requirements, as outlined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 have been followed in reaching the recommendations.

### **Risk assessment**

22. It is not deemed necessary to complete a formal risk assessment in respect of this procedural report.

### **Environmental / Climate and nature implications**

23. There are no environmental or climate and nature implications arising directly from the review of political proportionality.

### **Equalities implications**

24. There are no equalities implications arising, although the process of reviewing proportionality ensures that the democratically elected position of the Council is reflected in the Council's approach to committee and panel business.

### **Crime and disorder implications**

25. There are none arising from this report.

### **Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications**

26. There are none arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Table of allocations – to follow.

Appendix 2 – Appointments to Committees and Panels (Wishes of the Political Groups) – to follow.

### **Background Papers:**

Local Government and Housing Act 1989