

FULL COUNCIL – 9 SEPTEMBER 2019 – QUESTIONS AND REPLIES

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman

On the 3rd August 2019, Robert Jenrick, the Communities Secretary, instructed local authorities to plan intensively for Brexit.

Could you tell us about preparations that have been made by this Council for a no-deal option, what costs have been incurred and what sums have been set aside for this programme now and in to the future?

Answer:

I believe a full answer to this question was contained in the report to Cabinet on 4th September.

For those not present at the meeting of Cabinet. The report highlighted that Officers in the course of their normal work had carried out an assessment of the potential issues that the Council and its services may face from leaving the European Union, which was being regularly monitored. That relevant information is being signposted to local residents and business and we are working with the Local Resilience Forum should there be any broader area issues.

The report also identified that we had received £52,452 from the government as a contribution to these and any other costs incurred. I am informed by the Chief Executive that other than Officer time no costs have been incurred to date.

Question 2

From Cllr Philip Dowd to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services, Cllr Alison Hoare

Does the Councillor not think, rather than starting from scratch, learning from the East Riding of Yorkshire (with a recycling rate of 65%) would be a better start? There are economies of scale but the diversity of the local area is similar to the NFDC area.

Answer:

At the last Full Council meeting on 8th July, I outlined how a Member Working Group would be set up to develop a new Waste Strategy for NFDC. This is in response to recent developments at national and regional level which means it is timely to review our services and see how best we can meet the challenges that the future will bring. This Working Group is due to meet for the first time on Wednesday 18th September, and it will follow a fact-finding Member visit to Hampshire County Council's waste infrastructure on Monday 16th September.

The Terms of Reference for the Working Group are yet to be agreed at the first meeting, but it is highly likely that a key piece of work for the group will be to look at "best practice" from across the country. As the Councillor highlights, there are many high-performing authorities providing a range of services which we can look at and learn from when we develop our own

waste strategy, taking into account factors such as local waste disposal infrastructure, cost, environmental factors, and the views of the public.

I look forward to working with Cllr Dowd and 6 other Members on the group to develop this important Strategy.

Question 3

From Cllr Rebecca Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Investment and Corporate Services, Cllr Jeremy Heron

Residents of Hythe & Dibden who now use the new Lidl store in Hythe remain unaware as to where the £1.9m gained from the car park sale has been spent across the District. Can the Council identify where specifically and identifiably in Hythe and Dibden will benefit from this sale?

Answer:

It is standard practise for the Council to receive capital receipts throughout a financial year. These receipts are held within Capital reserves and are utilised to support the delivery of the Council's overall capital programme, which includes for example, the Commercial Investment Property Strategy.

Question 4

From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing, Cllr Mark Steele

What plans have been submitted for the redundant Waterside Sports and Social Club in Holbury which is owned by Esso? The previous holder of his post committed that it would remain in public use for those in Hardley and elsewhere, just before it was shuttered up. It is looking increasingly dilapidated and sorry for itself and local people are particularly worried about the loss of the leisure facility to potential development. Can he give me some assurances on its future use or a dialogue with Esso to which our Group could engage?

Answer:

I will answer these questions as fully as I can, firstly there have been no plans submitted by Exxon Mobile for the privately-owned site. I do not know of any commitments made by Cllr Binns when the site closed in December 2016. Secondly, I agree the site does look increasingly dilapidated and local people are worried. It is a prominent position in the village adding to a sense of feeling that the area has been ignored. We can't give any assurance to the future use of the "buildings", but I can give you some background on the work that has been undertaken to ensure the recreational land continues to be used for recreational purposes.

- The sports sections of the Sports and Social Club have established themselves as independent clubs and have organised themselves into a community sports association.*
- The Holbury Community Sports Association has a licence from Esso to use the Long Lane site for their sports.*
- The original sport sections were – Rugby, Football, Cricket, Tennis, Bowls, Boxing and Sailing.*

- *AFC Fawley, Fawley Cricket Club, Waterside Bowling Club and Waterside Tennis Club are members of the Holbury Community Sports Association.*
- *Rugby has relocated to Newlands Road and Boxing is currently operating out of Jubilee Hall in Fawley*
- *Unaware of the operation at Ashlett Creek but the Sailing Club appears to still be operating.*
- *Jamie Burton (NFDC Health and Partnership Manager) is working with the national governing body of sports for cricket and football and we have a watching brief on the developments and are in communication with these sections.*
- *Summer 2019 - HCSA report that Exxon have agreed to build a new pavilion and that the plans are currently being worked on. Once the build is complete then a lease will be offered. The HCSA rep reports "The future looks good for all the sections"*

There is a short fall in the formal open space in the district, so we will continue working with the local organisations to ensure access continues.

When I visited and spoke to volunteers, they have made good progress for their own clubs when raising finance, and currently exploring how to raise finance as the group Holbury Community Sports Association (HCSA).

Question 5

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman

Since 2010 local authorities including our own have endured significant and painful cuts, by the Government, forcing this Council to make difficult decisions that have reduced or cut valued services and removed jobs for local people. With a new administration - supported by many in the ruling group - will the Leader stand up for this Authority and its residents and demand a better financial deal and support for this council by writing to our local MP's and the new Cabinet member for Local Government, Mr Jenrick?

Answer:

This Council has an excellent track record of achieving significant savings, whilst protecting the services that mean so much to our residents. There is reason we're in a much stronger financial position than plenty other Councils across the Country, and this is because as an administration we've not be afraid to make difficult decisions.

The Council submitted a response earlier this calendar year to the Fair Funding Consultation. We now know that Local Government will receive a 1 year settlement for 2020/21. We will consider our response to this using the appropriate protocol, once we know the implications. The annual consultation process will surround the release of the provisional finance settlement and as it always has done, this Council will consider its response at the appropriate time.

Question 6

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, Cllr Jill Cleary

As many members of this Council will know, the New Forest is a tough place for young people and families when it comes to paying rent or affording a mortgage. Therefore, can the Portfolio Holder tell me what plans she has put in place to address the shocking lack of affordable housing options for young people and families locally?

Answer:

The recognised need and demand for affordable housing is driving some major changes and activities within this council from the development of strategic plans and policies, to our organisational objectives, and within our operational housing services.

As the newly adopted Housing Strategy and the draft Local Plan clearly set out, these activities are having to tackle the consequences of the much wider housing market, changes in national housing and welfare policy, and the local impact and constraints of our natural environment, squeezed as it is, between two conurbations.

Nonetheless we are actively rising to the challenges.

We have embarked upon a programme of change to increase the supply of all types of affordable housing including social and affordable rent as well as shared ownership. We are also making great strides to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for those in the greatest and immediate housing need. Through our new Allocation Policy, we will ensure that existing affordable housing resources are used to best effect for those in real housing need. We are also working hard to improve the housing conditions for those in the private rented sector who are unable to access or afford market housing. These are all priorities and actions that were documented within the new Housing Strategy that was adopted last December.

More specifically you may be aware that we are taking full advantage of our own ability to build new council housing and how we are scaling up those activities to provide at least 600 additional rented and shared-ownership homes by 2026. These 600 new council dwellings, when combined with the usual turnover of council and registered provider dwellings in our District, will enable over 3,000 households to secure an affordable home within the New Forest by 2026.

Members will be aware of our programme to increase the council's own stock of good quality temporary accommodation, and of the major changes being made to our housing allocation policy to ensure that affordable rented homes are prioritised most effectively.

And I hope you are also aware of the work of the Task and Finish Group on a new private sector housing strategy for the council and its planned outputs. Outputs that will see a focus on increased support for private rented tenants and the necessary "carrots and sticks" to encourage and address landlords of HMOs and self-contained rented accommodation.

Over the last 18 months I have been working closely with the Executive Head of Housing and Regulation and the Housing Team to develop and move all of these activities forward however let me reassure you that our daily work to increase and optimise affordable housing and to serve those in housing need goes far beyond these headlines.

And of course I'm mindful that succeeding in this area is not only about individual people – it is also about the future wellbeing of our district as a whole. Providing the right houses in the right places, including affordable housing, is at the heart of lasting and sustainable communities and our local economies.

Question 7

From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services, Cllr Alison Hoare

In the light of the perceived increase of dog worrying Forest livestock, and animals off the leash causing problems in public open spaces, can you please identify the dog warden resources we currently employ and whether there are any plans to increase such resources?

Answer:

All our enforcement officers and supervisors are trained to deal with any reported dog incidents which gives us district wide cover on a daily basis. Specific instances of dogs worrying livestock are the responsibility of Hampshire Constabulary Country Watch who will have details of any reported incidents. We work closely with them and where requested we will conduct joint visits. We are not aware of any increase, perceived or otherwise, in reports of dogs worrying livestock which are thankfully rare and the vast majority of dog owners and dog walkers take responsibility for their animals when livestock are present.

Question 8

From Cllr Alexis McEvoy to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman

It has been about a year since the whole district came within the boundary of the Solent LEP area. Have we seen any benefits from this change for the New Forest economy?

Answer:

The simple answer is yes, we have seen much more engagement and support to the needs of our businesses in the New Forest. In terms of engagement, Solent LEP Chief Executive and Board Members have regularly attended meetings of the New Forest Business Partnership to better understand how our 9,000 businesses operate.

In April we had the opportunity to present the challenges, opportunities and special needs of the New Forest to all those who attended the Solent LEP's Annual General Meeting. In May, Solent LEP held a Local Industrial Strategy Workshop in the New Forest to hear local views on the opportunities and challenges, together with the ambitions for the future of our area as a part of their development of a strategy for the Solent economy.

They are supporting funding bids to government to enable improvements to be made to the A326 and providing resources for a much needed high level infrastructure study, which will not only help the local economy but support our plans for more local housing in the area of Totton and the Waterside.

In order to ensure we have a strong New Forest voice I have taken on board the chairmanship of the Solent LEP Leader's Forum which is the engagement of all 9 local authorities, together with the National Parks with the LEP. The development of Solent LEP's Local Industrial Strategy is due with government at the end of this year so it is important that we get the needs of the New Forest heard.

Grateful for contribution of PH for finance and local economy.

Question 9

From Cllr Jan Duke to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris

I am concerned that the Post Office in Brockenhurst has just closed, the Sainsburys Local is closing in October and the local sandwich shop is also closing very soon. Could I ask the Portfolio Holder for the Local Economy what, if anything, we can do to support our local retailers across the District?

Answer:

Yes it is worrying to see 3 shops closing in Brockenhurst at roughly the same time.

This is something that both I and my Ward colleague Cllr. Holding have been working on for some time.

In more detail the sandwich shop is effectively changing hands and so any closure will be time limited.

Sainsburys is indeed closing on the 4th October. It was always a surprise when they opened directly opposite a much larger and better stocked Tesco store. It is a well positioned retail unit and we hope that someone will take advantage of its potential.

The Post Office closure is a great disappointment but not a surprise. I know that the Parish Council has been actively working to establish alternative Post Office services in the village.

All our High Streets are changing because in this digital age how we all shop is changing. Collectively we all visit Banks, Post Offices and shops much less than we used to.

Internet shopping and home delivery is becoming the norm. So what can be done?

NFDC has sponsored two mystery shopper programmes in Hythe and New Milton respectively. Each programme enabled the independent assessment of approximately 25 independent High Street businesses that were evaluated on areas including premises appearance, customer service and sales.

Following the inspections, businesses were provided with detailed feedback and specific training where common areas for improvement were identified. Awards were made to those who demonstrated best practice.

Further programmes are planned for the coming 12 months.

But every one of us can also do something. We can encourage our Parish Councils, Local Business Associations and our local retailers to work together to stage events.

People will visit their local High Streets if there is a reason which is not capable of being delivered in a van to their front door.

The Pancake Race, The Farmers Market, The French Market, The Film Festival, Easter, Halloween, Leaving the EU, Not Leaving the EU are all events which can be marked or celebrated in our local High Streets.