

**FULL COUNCIL – 24 FEBRUARY 2020 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS
UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A**

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Community Affairs, Cllr Diane Andrews

Sadly the arts are not included in the NFDC Corporate Strategy. The arts can be a useful tool in helping with well being, mental health, improving housing, consultation work, education about the natural environment and improving the built environment. Is Councillor Diane Andrews able to explain why the arts are not mentioned in the Corporate strategy other than a brief reference to encouraging film in the area and how the arts will be part of the Corporate Strategy in every portfolio, not just her own?

Answer:

I agree with you that the old Corporate Plan did not directly mention the Arts or Heritage. This does not mean that we did not support or encourage the Arts. For many years, this Council has supported the arts through our community grants programme. This money was crucial to the continuation of some smaller projects. Other larger projects like the St. Barbe's museum and art gallery we supported at start up, until they were able to financially stand on their own feet.

This year has been no exception and we have supported charities that nurture musical talent, undertake musical therapy, that promote dance, community theatre, youth theatre and artist development, art classes and indirectly ballet and pottery.

Cllr Rackham you are an artist and work in the community. You know that promoting and supporting the Arts is not just about money.

NFDC have organised the Forest Arts Forum for many years, we have developed this to be, what is now Folio. Folio ensures that the arts and heritage sector in the New Forest work collectively to support each other and the other communities in the district.

We worked with the National Park and Folio as part of a steering group to ensure the delivery of the New Forest Arts Festival.

We have established a consortium to lead an application to the Arts Council to bring in over £1m pounds to the district to increase opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activity.

We have applied for and managed a Heritage Lottery fund bid to ensure the upgrade and improvement of Eling Tide Mill.

In partnership with Forest Arts in New Milton we delivered a NEET project working with young people and a local artist to "upcycle furniture." This gave the 16-19 year olds the opportunity to learn other practical skills.

We have worked with Forest Forge Theatre Company and New Forest Heritage Centre to put together a project which has led to the 22 Miles of Sea exhibition.

We provided funding and support in establishing Artsway and supporting the conversion and takeover by Spud to become Spudworks.

We worked with the youth worker at New Milton and helped deliver the New Milton Youth and Cultural Festival 2019.

These are all indicative of our support of the arts and the acknowledgement that our authority has forged positive relationships with partners to ensure quality outcomes.

You may feel that this Council does not support the arts, but you are mistaken, perhaps it is that we have not publicised how much we have accomplished.

I would like to see this change so that our community is more aware of our valuable contributions and have the opportunity to see our commitment to art and heritage in the New Forest.

To this end, you will see from our updated corporate plan 2020-2024, that it clearly states as a priority to Support the Arts and Cultural heritage of the New Forest.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr Rackham.

Question 2

From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services, Cllr Alison Hoare

As this administration has said it will have an action plan to demonstrate its commitment to carbon reduction. Can you tell us what the existing carbon foot print of this authority is and your actions for reducing it year on year?

Answer:

Thank you for this question, one that is very important to this Council and especially our residents. It is clear from our recent research and discussions with other organisations in recent week such as the County Council that we need to fully understand our current position before we consider setting ourselves unrealistic and unachievable targets.

That's said we are doing our bit. We understand from the works undertaken from the Energy Savings Trust that our vehicle fleet produce 2,070 tonnes of Co2 based on our current fleet of 190 vehicles. You would have seen outside as you came in today two of our new electric vehicle fleet we have purchased 4 each of which saves 3.75 tonnes of Co2 compared to an average diesel vehicle in our fleet. These 4 vehicles will be trialled in other areas of the Council's operations to understand where they can practically be used. Since 2014 all new refuse vehicles that have been purchased have been powered by the latest Euro 6 diesel engine. Currently there are no other alternatives on the market for this operation given our geographical location.

With the regards to the management of our buildings (not including council housing) we are aware that these buildings produced 3639 tonnes of Co2 in 2018/19 compared with 4464 Co2 tones in 2016/17 from the use of Gas and Electricity. A reduction of 825 Co2 tonnes. Recent improvements to heating and lighting in these buildings have assisted in reducing these levels of Co2 produced. To put this in some context 1 tonne of Co2 is equivalent to:-

- *The average CO2 emission of one passenger on a return flight from Paris to New York*
- *Driving 6,000km with a diesel car*

We have also installed all new parking meters across the District all of these are solar powered, without any reliance on mains electricity.

We continue to utilise our solar panels on 8 of our buildings generating 149,979 Kilowatt hours of electricity in 2018/19.

I will continue to work with the officers to produce an environmental action plan based on clear themes so that we lead by example to our community in our fight against climate change. But I want to be clear that any targets or timescales that I ask the Council to set are achievable, unlike some authorities who are now realising that the targets they set as an initial reaction to climate change are not achievable at all.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the declaration of a climate emergency, the Portfolio Holder reiterated the commitment of the Council to delivering sustainable, deliverable and fully financed actions to tackle climate change, rather than making any declaration.

Question 3

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, Cllr Jill Cleary

What work has the Council undertaken to understand the reasons behind local homelessness, and what measures has the Housing team taken to counter those background issues. For example, we understand that a certain percentage of young people have been made homeless through family relationship issues. And a higher rate of divorce in later life creates a demand for single accommodation.

What level of detail does the Council possess to understand the reasons for certain demographic groups to become homeless?

Can we therefore begin to predict homeless figures in future years, and what level of planning to counter those rises is being taken?

Answer:

As Members will be aware, we have been working hard to provide the best possible service to those in our communities, who find themselves without a home. We have invested heavily in ensuring that we have a highly skilled Homelessness Team with access to the best case management systems to record and deal with, what can often be, a complicated and challenging process.

Part and parcel of the new ways we work in Housing recognises the need to record information to enable us to assess growing trends so that we can adapt our service and stay ahead of the game in finding housing solutions to help the most vulnerable people in our District. A number of years ago, we began collating important data, such as demographic information, the health and support needs of our homeless households and of course, the reasons for homelessness. Having now amassed information from over 3,500 applicants we are able to better inform our strategic priorities and target resources accordingly.

In particular response to Cllr Clark's questions and to give reassurance to my fellow members of the level of detail we hold; 42% of all approaches to this Council for housing assistance come from single people, of which 64% are from single males. We also have a clear understanding why our applicants are threatened with homelessness. For example, 27% of applicants approach the Council due to the ending of a tenancy. 23% of approaches to the Council come from people who have been asked to leave by friends and family. 6% of approaches are due to the breakdown in a relationship resulting in one of the parties becoming homeless.

9% of approaches for assistance to the Council are from young people, aged 18-25. Over the last year we have worked closely with Hampshire County Council, including the Care Leavers' Team, on a Housing Protocol, to ensure there is joined up thinking when both Councils are involved in a case. We have also employed a 'Private Sector Landlord Liaison Officer' whose principle role is to engage with landlords and letting agents to provide an early response to those in the private rented sector who are threatened with homelessness.

It is understanding this demand at a detailed level that has helped inform our strategic actions, including our strategy of creating our own temporary accommodation with an emphasis on single persons accommodation. As Members will know we have also recruited our own support workers to assist single people with particular vulnerabilities. We are also working hard on building good relationships with several landlords in our District who are willing to accommodate single people.

Our partnerships with external organisations are very much linked to the demand for our service, with joint drop in sessions with Drug & Alcohol services already in place, meetings with the Community Mental Health Team on specific cases, and more recently, a partnership with the Learning Disability Team.

We have taken the same analytical approach to the recording of household information when we implemented our new Housing Allocations Policy in January this year, to help us analyse housing need and respond appropriately.

We are committed to an annual review of our Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy and will factor in emerging trends and detailed data into our ongoing service planning and review of priority actions.

Members, I believe we are on a very firm footing to provide the very best service to a wide range of homeless households and individuals who present themselves to the Council. My Team of officers and I are wholly committed to this important work.

Note – in response to a supplementary question concerning empty homes, the Portfolio Holder thanked Cllr M Clark for his support and confirmed that the Council continued to do all within its powers in relation to empty homes.

Question 4

From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris

What efforts are being put into place by NFDC to encourage start ups and micro businesses to flourish within the Forest? Has consideration been given to adapt any managed or owned properties for small scale companies to expand thereby increasing rental revenue to the Council's coffers?

Answer:

Start-ups and micro businesses are actively supported in a number of ways. Informal support and signposting is provided by Economic Development Officers with formal 1-1 business advice being provided via a contract with Enterprise First as well as through a partnership with Solent Local Enterprise Partnership's Growth Clinics. To complement this, NFDC have produced a free 'Start your Own Business Book' in collaboration with Enterprise First which is available upon request. The scope of the 1-1 business advice is currently being reviewed with a view to broadening this offer to ensure that more businesses are able to access professional advice; enabling their business growth and improving their resilience. In line with this, a full

business case is currently being worked up for an ERDF bid which would see the placement of a professional business advisor in the District.

Local start-up and micro businesses have also benefited from a wide range of training and networking events provided by New Forest Business Partnership, supported by NFDC. Since 2015, micro and small businesses, including start-ups, have benefitted from grant investment from the £1.5 million New Forest LEADER Programme, which is administered by NFDC.

NFDC has worked with partners to enable development of new flexible workspaces. The provision of these flexible workspaces are particularly attractive to start-up and micro businesses as they do not require long term leases and therefore the risk is reduced. The Council continues to assess market demand with a view to identifying appropriate opportunities to develop managed or owned space which meet the needs of local business wishing to start-up and grow.

Note – in response to a supplementary question in relation to how the support is advertised to small business holders, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the number of enquiries received and that the upcoming work on the Council's website would improve connectivity with local businesses.

Question 5

From Cllr Alan O'Sullivan to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing, Cllr Mark Steele

Can the Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services confirm what protection is in place for schools, clubs etc for all the leisure centres in the New Forest in the new agreements?

Answer:

We have been working with the schools to clarify their requirements, these have been included as a protected element within the contract, also the operator can only increase any price by CPI.

It will be a contractual requirement for the Operator to honour all club bookings that are in place at the start of a contract which will be monitored by the Contract Manager. The earliest date of any agreement commencing will be 1 January 2021, and therefore these bookings will be honoured until 1 January 2022.

Question 6

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris

I have received a lot of correspondence from businesses in Lymington High Street about the proposed parking charges on Lymington High Street. The overwhelming feeling is that parking charges on the High Street will negatively impact on local businesses and a key part of the District Council's economic strategy is to support local businesses to thrive. What plans do the district council have to support those businesses affected?

Question 7

From Cllr Anne Corbridge to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris

We are aware that the agreement between Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council concerning on road parking comes to an end on 1 April 2020. We are also aware that

Hampshire County Council intend to impose parking charges for on street parking starting with Lymington High Street. We understand that this is contrary to Central Government policy on supporting our high streets.

It should be noted that Lymington and Pennington Town Council, Chamber of Commerce, the Lymington Society and popular opinion are strongly opposed to parking charges on the high street. Finally, we are led to believe that today Lymington, tomorrow New Milton, Barton-On-Sea and Ringwood.

May I ask the Portfolio Holder for the Local Economy for his views?

Answer to Questions 6 and 7:

Thank you to both councillors for your timely and pertinent questions.

In a previous answer I set out how we are and will continue to support the 9,000 businesses in the New Forest so that they can thrive.

I do share your concerns about the proposed on street car parking charges in Lymington, specifically the proposed reduction in free parking time from the first one hour down to 30 minutes. This would be most unhelpful to the High Street retailers in Lymington particularly at a time when there are many Government initiatives aimed at supporting our High Streets.

Now I also realise that Hampshire County Council has a budget to balance. Increased income from parking charges will play a part in that process. However, whilst it may be less noticeable in Basingstoke or Winchester, it is of far greater concern in Lymington and the New forest.

I have therefore written to the Leader of Hampshire County Council asking that the first one hour of free parking is reinstated.

Note – in response to a supplementary question from Cllr J Davies on taking action to safeguard future arrangements, the Portfolio Holder reiterated that he had taken the action of writing to Hampshire County Council in relation to the proposed changes.

Second Questions

Question 8

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Edward Heron

I have recently been contacted by a resident concerned about speeding vehicles outside Our Lady and St. Joseph Catholic School in my ward of Pennington.

There have been concerns among residents that money which should have been set aside for such measures during the development of the old Pinetops Nursery Site was not spent.

Can the Portfolio Holder clarify whether any money was received for traffic calming measures close to the Pinetops Development and whether that money was spent?

Answer:

The decision in respect of application number 15/10290 for 47 dwellings at Pinetops Nurseries did not require any site specific contributions towards transport infrastructure.

An application for 5 dwellings at Pinetops House under application number 14/11138 did require a site specific contribution towards transport infrastructure of £18,404 and this was secured through a Section 106 agreement.

This money has been received by the Council and has been allocated to LY/TP/42 which is for speed reduction measures along Ramley Road between Oliver Road and Yaldhurst Lane, to assist cyclists. The total cost of this project has been identified as £130,000 and this is now held by the Council. The scheme will be delivered by Hampshire County Council, as the highways authority.

Note – in response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that future details of traffic calming schemes could be passed to local ward councillors when available.