

**FULL COUNCIL – 6 JULY 2020 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS UNDER  
STANDING ORDER 22A**

**First Questions**

**Question 1**

**From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman**

Will the Administration urgently support New Forest traders, cafes and publicans by putting pressure on Camping in the Forest to reverse their ban on opening their managed campsites this summer?

Their action will mean that more than 3,000 pitches across 10 campsites in the New Forest will remain closed until next year.

As a High Street trader in Lyndhurst, I fear this could have a huge impact on the local economy and cause "absolute Armageddon" of illegal campers and crowds turning up in the area in a way which could impact all of us who represent all of the wards throughout the Forest.

As the summer builds wild campers will continue to camp illegally, light bonfires, use the Forest as a toilet, leave piles of rubbish, and park where they like in ever increasing numbers.

We know of other campsites which are opening, with new restrictions such as the closure of toilet and shower blocks, and that Camping regulations mean that units already have to be six metres apart.

*Answer:*

***The answer to this question was dealt with by the Leader of the Council under item 4 on the agenda – Leader’s announcements. The detail of the answer is outlined below:-***

*I wish to outline the steps we have taken since we became aware that Camping in the Forest (CITF) had taken a decision to not open any of their 10 sites (over 3,000 pitches) in the New Forest during 2020.*

*I need to firstly say that the Council received no notification of this action by the company until it was public knowledge. I am also aware that none of the New Forest partners – Forestry England, the National Park Authority, the Verderers or Go New Forest (CITF are one of their members) – had received any earlier notification either.*

*I am disappointed with the company and I am concerned as to the impact that this action may have both on the New Forest economy - Our estimate of the impact on the local economy from lost discretionary guest expenditure (50% occupancy of 3105 pitches over the 87 days between 4th July and 28th September) is a “conservative” £16 million, which is a staggeringly large figure. If you then add the cost of the associated loss of local employment, supply chain costs, their own revenue (a large proportion also spent locally by their staff).*

*With the campsites closed it also has the potential to have a significant impact on the New Forest environment and community if camping visitors arrive and have no proper facilities to use.*

*Recognising the potential adverse impact this could have on the New Forest, I requested the Council's Chief Executive to engage with all partners, in addition to those mentioned earlier this includes both Hampshire County Council (Transport issues) and the Police (Anti Social behaviour issues) in order to try and mitigate all issues that may occur before any new arrangements can be put in place.*

*For Members' information, CITF are a company formed by a partnership of Forestry England, an agency of the Department of Environment Food & Rural Affairs. (in total they operate 16 campsites in the United Kingdom, of which 10 are situated in the New Forest.)*

*Given the relationship with Government and the potential significant impact on the local economy and tourism businesses I on behalf of all our partners have written to the 3 Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy as well as our two local MP's, who I have personally spoken to requesting that they use whatever pressures are available to them to bring to bear on the company to reconsider their decision.*

*This is a critical moment for everyone who cares about the visitor generated economy in the New Forest and the very fabric of the forest's cultural heritage.*

*I am happy to include my letter within the minutes of this meeting.*

*I will add that efforts are being made to identify whether in the medium term any other local operators could extend their operations to offer more campsite pitches. I am hopeful and will update members on the progress we can make with partners on providing this to offset the current loss of campsites, should CITF not reconsider their decision*

*Note – as a supplementary comment, Cllr Brand highlighted a petition in respect of this matter on Change.Org. She encouraged all councillors to sign the petition.*

## **Question 2**

### **From Cllr David Harrison to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman**

A Member of Cabinet has been bold enough to question the purpose and effectiveness of Hampshire's Police & Crime Commissioner. Should the Leader of the Council now write to Government expressing the view that the post be abolished?

*Answer:*

*No - I am sure the Government like this Council has more important issues to consider at this moment in time.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question concerning the effectiveness of Police and Crime Commissioners, the Leader of the Council highlighted the recent funding secured by the Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner to support organisations that provided support to victims of domestic abuse.*

## **Question 3**

### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Investment and Corporate Services, Cllr Jeremy Heron**

Would the Cabinet Member consider taking forward a suggestion from the Lib Dem group and provide a review of assets owned by NFDC? With a focus on unused areas of land and buildings that are not currently supporting one of our valued services? This will be to support the impact of COVID-19 without allowing residents and services to be affected?

Answer:

*COVID-19 presents an unprecedented challenge to all local authorities. By Early May of this year, the Leader was looking to work across parties through the Task and Finish Groups to address the challenges and since then all four Groups have met. It is through that mechanism that we will format the correct and proportionate response rather than randomly throwing out the next thought that comes into someone's head.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on additional financial support arising from recent Government funding announcements, the Portfolio Holder welcomed a further financial award but looked forward to the specific details of this for New Forest District Council, before determining the impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.*

#### **Question 4**

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

When can we expect the blanket ban on the Salvation Army collection bins to be lifted, given the contract is with NFDC, as its clear that the material originally destined for such bins, have been dumped nearby and elsewhere, creating hazardous waste and attracting vermin?

Answer:

*The Salvation Army Trading Company, and the rest of the textile recycling sector, has had a difficult period during lockdown. These difficulties relate to keeping their bank collection staff safe and ensuring safety at sorting facilities which under normal circumstances involve a hand sorting process using staff in close proximity to each other. Importantly, the UK's textile recycling sector relies heavily on the export market, and several of those large overseas markets have been closed to imports in recent months, creating a significant drop in the market value of textiles worldwide. These factors combined to create a complete freezing of textile recycling supply chains.*

*The Council has been in regular contact with the Salvation Army Trading Company during this period, as they began to restart collections from around 10,000 full banks across the UK. Almost all the Salvation Army banks on NFDC land were emptied during June, although they remained closed to allow the contractor to deal with the backlog of material. The Salvation Army have advised that banks will be reopened very shortly, and regular collections will recommence.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question concerning other income streams, the Portfolio Holder reported briefly on the increase in new garden waste collection customers.*

#### **Question 5**

##### **From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Investment and Corporate Services, Cllr Jeremy Heron**

I understand that the COVID-19 lockdown has had a negative impact on the Council's finances. However, this cannot be an excuse to cut further services for the most vulnerable people in our district. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm to me now that the Council will look to borrow to invest in creating economic growth across the District rather than using budget cuts as the first port of call?

Answer:

*I refer you to my earlier answer, we are not proposing to make ad-hoc decisions in an attempt to grab the headlines. We will work through all the options within the Task and Finish Groups and deliver a reasoned and sound Medium Term Financial Plan.*

#### **Question 6**

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

Not counting the changes the Council has imposed due to the COVID-19 Crisis please can the Portfolio holder give me an update on the progress of the actions the authority has committed to do to reduce its carbon footprint?

Answer:

*Thank you for your question, we can all see for ourselves the difference people not travelling has had on our air quality, and during the lockdown our air quality monitoring systems identified a significant improvement in air quality in the areas that we monitor. Unfortunately we cannot take any credit for that, but the results show what can be achieved if people don't travel. Whilst the priorities of this Council have been to try and continue with services where possible during the last few months what is clear is that all of the Council's support staff can now fully work from home due to our previous investment in IT which in itself reduces the need to travel to and from work so often. I believe this will continue to be the case with less people needing to travel to work once we return to normal.*

*At the start of the lockdown we had just introduced Electric vehicles and replaced many of our petrol driven hand tools such as strimmers with electric versions. These have held up well during the last 4 months but are still in the evaluation period for the remainder of this summer.*

*I am committed to reducing our carbon footprint and as you are aware as you have been fully involved we are reviewing in line with the expected guidance arising from the soon to be published Environment Bill the type of refuse and recycling service that we provide to our residents. I am hopeful that this will allow our residents to recycle more and allow us to be able to give out a clearer message on what can and can't be recycled.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that regular updates would continue to be made to all councillors on the Council's progress in reducing its carbon footprint.*

#### **Question 7**

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

There is a great desire to take this opportunity to reset our services, community and society at this time with a wellbeing agenda to include a green agenda and investment in the arts and culture. For instance a solar farm that supports cultural projects or outdoor cinema nights to support the leisure centres. Will the Council join me in lobbying for support for the cultural industries in the area, many of whom have fallen through the cracks of available funding for this difficult time and to include a green agenda in our attempts to rebuild our district?

Answer:

*Most people know my support for the Arts and the very good things they deliver for our society. Therefore I am delighted to see today that the Government is providing extra funding to Arts, Culture and Heritage. We will look at the details and assess what that means for us in due course.*

*We have established Task & Finish Groups of councillors to enable us to engage with all within our community including local arts and culture organisations. This will enable us all to gain an understanding of what the impact has been from Covid 19 on the community. By September we hope to have completed a position statement that will enable us as a Council not only to better understand but link our plans including a budget to all our priorities, including the green environment. I believe in approaching our community impact assessments in this way all members will be better informed in supporting the Council's approach.*

*Note – in response to supplementary question on Arts appearing across all Portfolio performance targets, the Leader of the Council welcomed this suggestion via the Task and Finish Group process.*

## **Second Questions**

### **Question 8**

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

Can I ask what support there has been for Council staff over the past few months in these unprecedented times with their roles and work/life balance? They have been amazing support for Councillors and residents alike.

Answer:

*There has been a wealth of information available through Forestnet including links to other websites such as MIND where employees can complete their own short self assessment of how they are doing and get tips on how to look after their own wellbeing. We have a dedicated page on Forestnet on the HR pages for Mental Health with many links to other organisations who can offer support.*

*Managers have been encouraged to stay in touch with their staff on a regular basis if they are working from home. Good communication being the key to ensuring staff don't feel isolated.*

*In operational areas we have ensured that robust risk assessments have been undertaken and in some areas changes to working practices have had to be introduced in order to keep staff safe. That has also happened in the offices with Perspex screens being introduced at reception areas as an example.*

*For most of leisure we have supported them through topping up the furlough grant.*

*Our HR team have been running numerous courses during lockdown – To enable all members to see the detail I will ask for a table of all sessions run and the number of staff who attended to be added to the minutes of this meeting. Within these sessions a key focus has been on mental health awareness including the training of 10 more mental health first aiders. But we have also tried to support managers by providing them with courses such as managing teams remotely.*

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Number of sessions</b>	<b>Number attended</b>
Mental Health Awareness for Managers	2	10
Wellbeing & Mindfulness techniques	2	23
Mental Health First Aider	1	10
Managing employees remotely	3	9
Brief Bite Mental Health Awareness for managers	1	TBC
Brief Bite Embracing Equality & Diversity	1	7
Brief Bite Homeworking	1	10
Brief Bite Managing Performance	1	8
Brief Bite Sickness & Absence Management	1	6
Brief Bite Performance Reviews on the Hub	2	TBC
Excel Introduction	4	32
Excel Intermediate (external)	3	24
Dealing with difficult behaviour and situations	1	TBC
Developing your leadership brand	1	TBC
Delegation and Motivation	1	TBC

### **Question 9**

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

I understand that the COVID-19 lockdown has had a negative impact on the Council's finances. However, this cannot be an excuse to cut further services for the most vulnerable people in our district. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm to me now that support for homeless people, and those facing homelessness, across the New Forest will not be cut?

*Answer:*

*The Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy of 2019 makes a number of significant pledges to support homeless households in our District. Never before has so much been done to support the most vulnerable in our communities and the Council is at the forefront of this important work. We have, for the first time, employed our own Homelessness Support Workers who provide direct support to the most vulnerable homeless households. We have created more of our own temporary accommodation which provides a better alternative to the use of external B&B and during the course of this financial year, we plan to bring on board a number of new additional facilities for this purpose.*



*Our partnership working with the voluntary sector and statutory agencies, through the Homelessness Multi Agency Forum, places us in an excellent position to ensure that there is joined-up thinking to finding solutions to the many problems that our homeless households often face.*

*Members will know how passionate I am to ensure that we do everything we can to help those who find themselves without a home and I believe that the wide range of measures that we have implemented has made an enormous difference to their lives.*

*We know that the government has pledged financial support to help local authorities end rough sleeping and provide greater support to vulnerable homeless households and already, we have benefited from these funding announcements.*

*Members, this Council will continue to deliver on all the pledges set out in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy of 2019 and I will continue to ensure that we do the right thing and support those people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Everyone deserves a home and I know that the District Council will do everything it can to deliver on this key priority.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the use of hotels as part of the Council's response to homelessness during the height of the pandemic, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that some hotels were still being used although this was being phased out as the hospitality sector began reopening.*