

## FULL COUNCIL – 12 OCTOBER 2020 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A

### First Questions

#### Question 1

**From Cllr Sue Bennison to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, Cllr Jill Cleary**

With ever increasing demands being placed on Council resources, could the Portfolio Holder for Housing reassure Councillors that all opportunities are being taken to apply for funding from Central Government to support the very good work of our housing department in helping provide more homes for local people including the vulnerable in our communities.

Answer:

*At a time of great uncertainty and when every penny counts, I'm pleased to report that our Council has been successfully competing alongside many other housing authorities and registered providers to secure much sought after revenue and capital funding at national level.*

*As part of the Government's COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation 'Next Steps' Programme, this Council has secured a quarter of a million pounds to help house people at risk of rough sleeping into longer-term sustained accommodation. I'm absolutely delighted as this funding will embed the hard work and achievements of our Housing Officers to make a lasting and potentially lifetime difference for some of our most vulnerable citizens.*

*Covering the costs of temporary accommodation through to the end of March 2021, this funding will not only give the necessary time to work with the remaining group of those at risk of rough sleeping, it will also provide the financial help that is needed to secure long term private rented accommodation plus the support required to help new tenants sustain that accommodation.*

*Changing tack to our own development plans, I am very pleased to advise that recent bids to Homes England for capital funding have secured over £500,000 towards 13 brand new affordable homes to be delivered within our District - developments that are to include our first Council homes for Affordable Rent and for Shared-Ownership, as pledged in our Housing Strategy.*

*A number of our emerging new-build schemes have also been marked as potential bids for Homes England funding, so we are not looking at these outcomes in isolation – we are planning more for the future.*

*But setting aside the sums of money involved, I'm also thrilled because these efforts, and results, help to raise the national profile of New Forest District Council and strengthen our local leadership status.*

*Going forward I expect to see the Housing Team participate in other emerging arenas for national funding, whether it is for revenue, capital or grants to households, and I will be delighted to report back in due course.*

## Question 2

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

Could the Portfolio Holder for Business update us with what the Government Grant of £159,208 to support local High Streets has been spent on so far, how much of the Grant is left and what plans are in place to continue to support our High Streets over the Autumn/Winter period.

*Answer:*

*The Reopening the High Street grant is paid retrospectively so the Council reclaim from Central Government once expenditure has been incurred. The criteria for what the Council can reclaim monies for is quite narrow, so some suggested initiatives that have come forward have not been eligible. Claims for re-imburement can only be made on a quarterly basis to date there has not been a reclaim to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. There are a number of current initiatives that will be included in the next reclaim period and these include the joint initiative with Go New Forest and further initiatives are to be encouraged. As we are now moving into the Autumn we will be reviewing the current position and looking to ensure that there are further initiatives that are eligible for this funding stream. I would encourage councillors to talk to their Town and Parish Councils and am happy to talk further about what we might do for your ward of Lyndhurst.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on guidelines for the use of these funds, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that there is a link on the Council's website to the relevant information and this can be shared.*

## Question 3

### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Edward Heron**

Following on from several examples raised by residents, would the Portfolio Holder consider reviewing the current NFDC policy for not advising residents/businesses of a planning application directly opposite their property? Especially considering that this point was also raised in the consultation, over how it consults the community on planning applications?

*Answer:*

*The criteria for neighbour notification is set out in the Statement of Community Involvement, a policy that the Council has this evening adopted a refresh of.*

*This is a minimum requirement which, unlike many Councils, includes both neighbour notification letters and displaying site notices.*

*Planning Officers will use their professional judgement to decide whether, on more complex applications, there is a need to notify and consult more widely. But this will be assessed on a case by case basis.*

*I am satisfied that the current position is proportionate and consider that the Council is providing a good service in sending out both letters and displaying site notices on all applications.*

*In response to the question, I did look through the consultation responses on the Revised Statement of Community Involvement and there were no consultation responses on the issues raised.*

#### **Question 4**

**From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Edward Heron**

Could the Portfolio Holder please acknowledge that the move to charge for parking in Totton will have a detrimental impact on businesses in the town centre? These charges will also impact on workers at those businesses who may be on low wages, and it will be an added imposition for those needing to visit one of the three health centres and a community centre which specialises in activities for older people?

*Answer:*

*The introduction of new parking arrangements in the Civic Centre, Westfield Road and Winsor Road car parks in Totton will increase the availability of short-stay spaces for the use of customers visiting local businesses.*

*The Westfield Road car park will retain 120 long-stay spaces to ensure those travelling to the Town for work have adequate parking. However, in line with discussions within the all-party Off-Street Parking Working Group, priority in car parks closest to the main shopping areas is given to those accessing businesses and services.*

*New Forest District Council, through the annual shoppers short-stay clock offers exceptional value parking. A resident making use of their shoppers clock for three hours parking, once a week, will in effect be paying an equivalent rate of less 18 pence per hour to park.*

*We are of course concerned that some of our residents are working for lower wages than any of us would want. Many of our lowest paid residents either do not have access to a private vehicle or choose the more sustainable option of public transport.*

*The Office for National Statistics estimates that the average household in the 3rd decile income group, an annual income of £16,744, spends £2,922 a year on motoring expenses.*

*While no additional cost is welcomed by those on low wages, I do not believe that an equivalent cost of 46 pence per working day, for a long-stay parking clock, will place an undue burden on those who can afford a car.*

*This will end the unfair situation where Forest residents who can't afford to run a car, are subsidising the cost of parking in Totton through their taxes, for the benefit of those who can afford private transport.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the consultation undertaken prior to the decision, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the parking order would go out for consultation and the responses to that period of consultation would be considered.*

#### **Question 5**

**From Cllr Mark Clark, to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> August this year the County Council Network released a report compiled by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) suggesting that by scrapping 213 lower tier councils to create single unitary councils, it could deliver £3bn saving over five years and 'maximise' the benefits of economic growth and housing policy. Our understanding is that Ministers have

signalled that they're likely to advocate fewer, larger authorities - and possibly more elected mayors - when they publish a paper on devolving power in the autumn.

Does the Leader agree with the CCN Report, and that this Council should simply pack up and go home? Or is he willing to fight alongside the Liberal Democrats for more local accountability, not less?

*Answer:*

*The expected White Paper on "Devolution and Local Recovery" has been a very topical item over the summer. As Conservatives our objective is always to do what is best for the community of the New Forest. If, and when the government "White Paper" is published, we will look at it very closely with the best interests of our community at the fore front of our considerations.*

*As for what we will concentrate our time on at this extremely difficult time for many in our community is ensuring that the District Council is both effective and efficient and our workings with partners and others in local government delivers what is needed by our community, because that is what matters.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question in relation to previous work in 2016 undertaken on devolution and local government reorganisation, the Leader reiterated the need to wait for the white paper to understand how best to respond.*

## **Question 6**

**From Cllr Mahmoud Kangarani to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Edward Heron**

Does the Portfolio Holder realise that imposing car parking charges and limits on time of stay in the Town Centre car parks will deprive employees, working in central Totton, of anywhere to park?

*Answer:*

*There are 120 long stay spaces remaining at the Westfield Road car park, which is a 120 metre walk from the Civic Centre.*

*As Councillor Kangarani is aware, as a Member of the all-party Off-Street Parking Working Group, there was a clear steer from Members that we should be prioritising spaces closest to the shops and services for those who are customers and it is not unreasonable for those employed in the businesses to walk a little bit further on their way to work so that we have space for customers to access. The use of a long stay parking clock equates to 46p per working day as an increase in costs to employees and I do hope most responsible employers are not paying wages at a level that would cause undue distress.*

## **Question 7**

**From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services, Cllr Alison Hoare**

New Forest District Council previously committed a large sum of money to the redevelopment of Lymington Quay which has now been postponed because of COVID-19. Is that money still committed to that project and, if so, how long is it committed for?

Answer:

*The project was rightly postponed because of COVID-19 just as we were starting to engage in the planning process that would have delivered a refurbished public conveniences and shower facility during 2021, as well commencing improvements to the public realm of the area of Lymington Quay.*

*Partners have recently got together and are working up a scheme for an opening in March 2022.*

*Obviously, the pandemic has required that the plans for the project were revisited. Both due to lessons learnt from the pandemic (e.g. reduced need for communal areas for showers and to ensure that whatever facility is built is COVID safe) as well as the economic impact that all partners have experienced during this time.*

*I believe that all the partners will very shortly be able to share details with the wider community of the project that will go forward.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that there would be future public consultation once the project re-commenced.*

#### **Question 8**

**From Cllr Anne Corbridge to the Portfolio Holder for Community Affairs, Cllr Diane Andrews**

In the event of a local lock down for Covid-19 who will be the lead authority? Have Central Government funds been allocated to facilitate this?

Answer:

*Firstly, in the event of a future lockdown, the responsibility would be with the Director of Public Health at Hampshire County Council, although of course we would be involved.*

*As for the funding of a lockdown, this is premature thankfully. We do not know what future funding would look like but I presume that the Government would be allocating grants and more information would be forthcoming at that time.*

*However, as the Leader explained earlier, we have just received funding to provide COVID marshals for the next four months. I will be meeting with officers tomorrow morning to prepare for this initiative and I will have more information for councillors very soon.*