

**FULL COUNCIL – 25 FEBRUARY 2021 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS  
UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A**

**First Questions**

**Question 1**

**From Cllr Ann Sevier to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barry Rickman**

The Leader is undoubtedly aware of the tragic accidents on the B3078 Roger Penny in December of last year. In one incident three donkeys were killed, in another four ponies. Whilst these awful incidents have once again brought the lamentable death toll on this road back into the headlines, sadly rarely does a month go by that there isn't an animal killed on this road. I know, because as a practicing Commoner I have lost animals on this road myself. My question is, what can this Council do to try and reduce the animal deaths on this road and across the Forest?

*Answer:*

*As you are aware, I have been working for some years to try and reduce the number of animal casualties on New Forest roads and the B3078 in particular. Members might not be aware but the B3078 is one of two roads which between them see the vast majority of animal accidents. It is important to state that this Council does not have primary responsibility for highways, law enforcement or the management of the stock. But we have influence and we are representatives for our residents. Whilst not all casualties are speed related, I do not believe that it is a coincidence that this road, when monitoring shows that nearly half the vehicles travelling along it are exceeding the speed limit, is also one of the roads with the highest number of casualties.*

*Members may be aware that there is a petition before this Council at the moment, submitted by a resident who leads the New Forest Roads Awareness Campaign. It has just over 1,100 signatures at the moment. This calls for average speed cameras on the road which is something I have long supported. I hope that once this petition comes forward to be answered in the usual way in this Council, that this Council can join with me in supporting the initiative as a trial on this road where the vast majority of these casualties occur, including these two tragic incidents. And may I also add that there was another tragic incident which was a hit and run between those two, where three sheep were killed.*

*Notes – in response to a supplementary question regarding the use of average speed cameras, the Portfolio Holder applauded the work of the local police force and countryside watch team for all they had done to try and sort the issue. However, whilst 'in principle' support had been given to the initiative by a number of organisations, to date the Police had not done so. In considering the petition at the appropriate time, the Council could then choose to make representations to the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner in support of the initiative.*

*This question was answered by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Cllr Edward Heron.*

## Question 2

### **From Cllr Michael Thierry to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris OBE**

A range of tradespeople well serves the New Forest, many working as sole or partnership businesses. Carpenters, gardeners, hairdressers, plumbers, electricians etc. Significant numbers, part of this important local workforce, were unable to receive government support in either the first or second 'lockdowns'. Their status as sole directors of a limited company excluded them from government assistance. There was no scheme for them. The Government addressed the issue in the January 2021 'lockdown'. Funds were available in a new arrangement. Will the Portfolio Holder confirm that this previously denied group is now receiving the full support of their entitlement, adding to the long list of businesses, of all complexion, who have received funding administered by New Forest District Council?

Answer:

*Through the initial Discretionary Grant Fund and subsequent Additional Restrictions (Discretionary) Grant, New Forest District Council has not excluded sole traders, Limited Companies or Trades people from applying to these schemes. These schemes have provided extensive financial support to businesses which have otherwise been excluded from Government schemes. Many of the mentioned Trades people, sole traders or Limited Companies do not have fixed premises costs and therefore could not access the Grants associated with a Premises Rateable Value. In recognising this we have made special provision for businesses which are registered at a domestic premise even though their business activity may be conducted in the local community.*

*The Additional Restrictions Grant launched in November last year introduced a specific home based business category. The creation of this home based tier coupled with the simple application process has enabled a high volume of applications from those previously excluded. To date over 60% of all applications received have come from this new funding tier. The total value of grants awarded to home based businesses is forecast to be well in excess of £1million by the time the scheme closes for applications at the end of February 2021.*

*I would add my thanks to everyone involved in this process at New Forest District Council. It has and continues to be a brilliant team effort.*

## Question 3

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

Following the interesting media posting placed by the Council's comms department on Friday 12th February, can the Portfolio Holder for the Environment please confirm how we compare to other councils in terms of our recycling record for cardboard and how it would be improved by latest measures to charge for cardboard packaging collection?

Answer:

*During the past year, mixed recycling tonnage collected at the kerbside within the NFDC have risen by 8% as a result of more waste being generated within homes by residents who are staying at home more as well as many more home deliveries. This is understandable and it is great for the environment that residents are separating their cans, tins, plastic*

bottles, paper, cardboard and aerosols so they can be recycled rather than being sent to for energy recovery.

Unfortunately, we are unable to accurately separate the recycling performance for cardboard as this is counted as dry mixed recyclables and is combined with cans, paper and plastics.

Currently on average we recycle 34%, Hampshire's average is 38%, the national average is 44% and the highest performer is 64%.

So, we all know the New Forest needs to have a much better, greener refuse and recycling service, which is why we have recently undertaken our future waste strategy consultation, we are also still working hard with the member's task and finish group to have a collection system that will improve our environmental performance on many fronts but must also take into account the unique nature of the forest.

I would like to confirm there are no proposals to charge for the collection of household cardboard from the kerbside. The recent message that went out on the 12th of February was in response to the significant quantities of exceptionally large cardboard boxes being put out for collection by businesses and trades men and this is clearly trade waste and therefore should be charged for.

I am sorry if this message caused some confusion, we did remove it within 3 hours once we realized that was the case. The post was aimed at protecting the council taxpayer from incurring the cost of disposing of trade waste through the household waste collection.

#### **Question 4**

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

How many homeless children remain in temporary accommodation during lockdown and does she have a breakdown for the length of time these children have been in temporary accommodation?

Answer:

Members, we have all seen the impact that Covid and subsequent lockdowns have had on our community and indeed, some of our homeless household have struggled hugely at this time. However, I am pleased that such households have had the unwavering support of the Council's Housing Teams who have helped them obtain the support and accommodation they need.

As of today, there are currently 8 families with a total of 12 children who are in temporary emergency accommodation, 3 of which are of young school age. Without the hard work and dedication of our homelessness officers and housing support teams, I know these figures would be much higher.

Of these 8 families, 2 entered emergency accommodation in the last week, with a further 2 in mid to late January, 1 on the last day of December, 1 in November and 1 in October. 1 further case has been with us a little while longer whilst the mother receives the necessary intensive support to ensure she is ready to sustain her next move.

Members, whilst we all appreciate that time spent in emergency accommodation should be time limited, it is important to bear in mind that to families fleeing domestic violence or losing their accommodation at short notice, it is a lifeline. Where possible, we ensure families have cooking and laundry facilities whilst our Homelessness team resolve a move to longer term accommodation.

*Members, I am pleased to inform you that 4 of these families have been nominated to our private sector lease family housing which will provide suitable self-contained accommodation within the next few weeks. Our Housing Maintenance teams are currently working their way around Covid restrictions to prioritise this much needed housing for them. A further family will enter our brand new Mother and Baby accommodation in New Milton very shortly, of which I am very proud. We are continuing to work hard to secure appropriate family accommodation for the remaining 3 families.*

*Members, you will all be familiar with our strategic aim to end the use of externally owned temporary accommodation and we are making great progress in this regard. I am delighted to announce that in the next 3 months we will be welcoming residents to our new Council owned facilities in Heather Road, Blackfield and Blease Court and Tourlands in Lymington. Recent additions to the temporary accommodation portfolio already includes Pentagon Court, Blackfield, Ocknell Grove, Hythe and Ashley Road in New Milton.*

*Members will know of the Council's unwavering commitment to homeless households. We will make sure that they have the necessary support and accommodation they deserve in order to improve their lives.*

### **Question 5**

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

In light of the recent reports of animal deaths on Roger Penny Way, will he support the calls of local residents for an Average Speed Camera System along this route to protect animals from harm?

*Note – this question was dealt with at the same time as question 1. Please refer to question 1 for the response.*

### **Question 6**

#### **From Cllr Alexander Brunsdon to the Portfolio holder for Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Edward Heron**

What impact does the Portfolio Holder think the government's proposed planning reforms will have on the towns and parishes in the New Forest which are still going through the neighbourhood plan process?

*Answer:*

*The recent Government consultation "Planning for the Future" said "... we think Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system, but we will want to consider whether their content should become more focused to reflect our proposals for Local Plans, as well as the opportunities which digital tools and data offer to support their development and improve accessibility for users. By making it easier to develop Neighbourhood Plans we wish to encourage their continued use and indeed to help spread their use further, particularly in towns and cities." Proposal 9 of the consultation stated "Neighbourhood Plans should be retained as an important means of community input, and we will support communities to make better use of digital tools".*

*The Council responded to the consultation agreeing the importance of Neighbourhood Plans but expressing concerns about their future role should the planning system, particularly in regards to design standards and place making, become overly prescriptive in a more centrally-controlled planning system.*

*I would urge any Town or Parish Council currently progressing a Neighbourhood Plan to continue to do so, this was a consultation and no relevant changes have yet been made to the legislative of policy framework for Neighbourhood Plans. This Council, through its close working relationship with Towns and Parishes progressing Neighbourhood Plans within its planning area, will ensure that any changes proposed by the Government following this consultation are communicated to them and advise on any impact these may have on their plans.*

#### **Question 7**

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

What are the Portfolio Holder's plans for improving the mental and physical wellbeing of our residents, now that the health and leisure Centres will likely be managed by an external provider?

Answer:

*Improving the health and wellbeing of our community is best done working with partners, our partnership with the NHS is key to delivering for our community. I hope that as we approach the Autumn we are able to work with all our partners to finalise our Health and Wellbeing strategy and action plan.*

*I was so pleased to hear on Monday, that we can now plan to open our Health and Leisure centres from the 12th April, I can confirm that we will be ready to open all 5 centres as soon as government guidance allows.*

#### **Question 8**

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

What are the next steps she will take to tackle coastal erosion across all our coastlines?

Answer:

*With regard to erosion across the district, we and our communities need to be aware that not everywhere can be protected from the effects of coastal erosion. The coastline is a dynamic environment that will continue to change, particularly through climate change and increased storms. But where we are able, we will work with other agencies and private landowners to do so. In recent months we have seen the work being carried out at Milford on Sea and I am incredibly pleased to report that the council has completed these urgent works enabling the protection of properties within the vicinity of the failed sea wall.*

*Where appropriate and where a project can be justified, technically, environmentally and financially we will continue to promote schemes. Crucially the delivery of these will depend on the receipt of grant aid funding and partnership funding.*

*Across the district there are several current projects that the council is engaged with to deliver schemes that will better protect our communities, businesses and environment. These include:-*

- *Hurst Spit to Lymington project*
- *Westover phase 2 scheme development and Milford frontage scheme assessment.*

- *Barton-on-Sea development of trials to manage ground water impacts on cliff stability.*
- *Coastal monitoring to inform of coastal change and data collection for future schemes.*

*We are working with BCP Council to deliver a strategy study for Christchurch Bay and we are continuing to deliver the council's maintenance programme for our coastline.*

*At the next Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, I have asked for an officer from the Environment Agency to attend to explain to members the roles and responsibilities of the organisations dealing with coastal management.*

## **Question 9**

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

Following the very public video of a Parish Council meeting that showed Cllrs in a poor light, does he agree that NFDC must use this as an opportunity to promote this authority and local town and Parish councils, and encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to become engaged with local government? And will he agree to working with local schools to return the democracy days we have previously held?

*Answer:*

*The Government Regulations introduced in April 2020 that permitted local authorities to hold virtual meetings, presented Councils with an overnight shift to deliver decision making meetings in a new way. I am really proud of how all our members and officers have worked hard to adapt to the challenges this has presented. Reflecting on the recent Parish Council meeting press coverage you refer to, we all know how difficult these meetings can be, and it is worth reminding ourselves of some the principles this Council took forward back in 2020, starting with the Cabinet meeting on 6 May 2020.*

- *To be mindful of the individual participants' own circumstances at meetings;*
- *to be patient with one another; and*
- *to remember that this technology and way of working is still very new for many.*

*Maintaining our commitment to these principles only seeks to promote this authority as an example of good local democracy. Whilst virtual meetings have been challenging, a resulting benefit has been our ability to broadcast and reach more of our New Forest residents, either live, or at their convenience after a meeting, with over 7,300 views on our meetings since that first Cabinet meeting I mentioned last May. I would remind Members that it is also our duty as individual local councillors to engage with people of all ages and backgrounds to bridge that gap from "the Council" to the Community. Done successfully, this can promote and inspire new people into local democracy.*

*I would highlight to Members the "Make a Change – Become a Councillor" Campaign being run by the National Association of Local Councils. We have been promoting this on our social media channels and I would encourage our Town and Parish Councils to do the same. The campaign speaks to much of what Cllr Wade raises, encouraging people from all backgrounds and experiences who reflect their community to put themselves forward for election.*

*With regard to your specific question on engaging with local schools, I would be happy to consider how we might seek to engage the young people of the New Forest in the Local Democracy Week for 2021, which normally takes place in October.*

## **Question 10**

**From Cllr Mahmoud Kangarani to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Cllr Michael Harris OBE**

Can the Portfolio Holder report if he has made any progress in improving local broadband service by talking to New Forest providers? In the past, we have heard that this Council has been trying and lobbying, but he has not mentioned lately if there has been progress.

*Answer:*

*Broadband remains high on my agenda and as we have all experienced over the past year it plays a critical role in supporting communication, our communities and the economy of the local area. I am delighted that the Local Plan now has a policy requiring the provision of a High Speed fibre broadband connection and we have already granted permissions conditional on this provision. Currently significant progress is being made with a project to roll out 5G across the Waterside.*

*I am very shortly due to meet with the National Park and the Solent LEP to discuss how we can work with them to enable the installation of infrastructure to facilitate stronger coverage over the whole of the area. I am also aware of several community projects that have been successfully rolled out over the past few months. I have and will continue to lobby at the highest national level to improve broadband within the New Forest.*

## **Second Questions**

### **Question 11**

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

Following an application in Hythe for six homes that was decided by officers, can the cabinet member review if these important proposals can go to committee and ensure any issues are debated, and therefore resident concerns acknowledged?

*Answer:*

*The exercise of the power to delegate planning functions is generally a matter for individual local planning authorities, having regard to practical considerations including the need for efficient decision-taking and local transparency. It is in the public interest for the local planning authority to have effective delegation arrangements in place to ensure that decisions on planning applications that raise no significant planning issues are made quickly and that resources are appropriately concentrated on the applications of greatest significance to the local area. The government has been clear that planning authorities should be determining majority of planning applications under delegated powers – with majority meaning 95% or more. I am aware that last year we determined 95% of decisions under delegated powers so I am comfortable that our scheme of delegation is proportionate.*

### **Question 12**

**From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Edward Heron**

Referring to the unoccupied VIVID housing development along the Fawley Road, Hythe, and the lack of published evidence that the reinstalled soakaways on this site are now at the correct depth.

This is despite being instructed by yourself and the Governance & Housing Executive Head to the Chief Planning Officer to do so. Why is this?

Further, why is there no published documentation regarding the ongoing proposals for the Public Open Space and the children's play area on this site? Surely any future occupiers of the properties will need to know what these proposals consist of and should be published?

*Answer:*

*I apologise that the site notes of the inspections that were carried out by planning and building control were not made public documents due to an internal error, these notes are now public documents. There are published documents showing some preliminary ideas for the public open space and children's play area but this is a matter that is still being agreed with the developer Vivid Homes. Vivid are communicating with their future tenants about the site and will be maintaining on going relationship with the future occupants as managers of properties and space.*