

**FULL COUNCIL – 6 SEPTEMBER 2021 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS
UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A**

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Philip Dowd to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Edward Heron

It is appropriate that the Council recognises its role to support people with disabilities by having a reference to Equality and Diversity in each major decision. What impression do you think a disabled person in the New Forest would get from nearly every published report containing the phrase 'There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising directly from this report'? How might the Council communicate its commitment to disabled residents more effectively?

Answer:

The Council takes its responsibilities with regards to its role in promoting equality and diversity in the workplace but also in the District as a whole very seriously. The Council has published corporate equality guidance for ensuring due regard is made to all members of our community, especially residents and employees with varying disabilities in its decisions. This guidance is available on Forestnet and covers how to ensure NFDC makes decisions that are inclusive to all residents and staff receive training to ensure they are kept up to date with changes in legislation. Officers will refer to this guidance when preparing their reports.

The section of each report titled Equality and Diversity is used to identify if the decision being made has a direct impact on certain sections of community or employees and the implications for that decision. Officers will refer to that guidance in deciding whether that is relevant to the report. I do think it is useful to have that section there even if the officers include in their report that there is no impact and that is quite rightly recorded because by having that step, it ensures officers give due regard when preparing their reports.

Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding the District Council as an Equal Opportunity Employer, the Leader referred to the minutes of the HR Committee and that the Council continued to strive to be an employer of choice, enriched by the diversity of its staff and councillors.

Question 2

From Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Mark Steele

Now the leisure centres are no longer managed by this authority, what strategy does the Portfolio Holder have for supporting the physical and mental well-being of residents, as covid restrictions have reduced? Especially considering the impact of such a positive summer of sport where many in the community of all ages were inspired by our incredible Olympic and Paralympic Athletes, and indeed the England men's Football Team? What can we do to help engage and provide opportunity for residents of all ages and in all corners of the District to get involved?

Answer:

We will shortly be starting the work on the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a Task and Finish Group will be set up after the community panel meeting next week. We will work with partners to focus on developing and importantly delivering a strategy that supports the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents. The chief medical officer has identified being physically active as one of the most important things that people can do for their overall health and wellbeing. This is important for all members of our communities but we know that there are some sections that are less active and we are working to improve participation in these sectors particularly. We are proud to see our residents excel in sports and parasports. We are equally proud of all the volunteers and grass roots organisations that have helped residents find their way to be active and we are pleased to support them in making this happen.

Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding the involvement of the Council's leisure centres in this process, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that Freedom Leisure, the Council's new partner in running and operating the leisure centres, would be a key partner in the development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Question 3

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Edward Heron

We have seen reported an Afghan family relocated within the New Forest area and they are very welcome. Hampshire County Council have said they are working with the Home Office to help relocate displaced families across the County.

Can the Leader update us on the situation and whether we can expect other families to be relocated within the New Forest?

Answer:

We fully recognise the importance of supporting Afghan nationals who have worked alongside our British armed forces in Afghanistan with relocating to the UK, along with their families. We are already actively working with Hampshire County Council, the Home Office and partners as part of the governments national Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy scheme, aptly named "Operation Warm Welcome" where all councils have been asked to secure a property to house a family. I am pleased to announce that we are one of the first councils in Hampshire to be supporting a family who we will be welcoming to the district in mid September, with all the necessary procedures and arrangements having been completed. We are in discussions to secure further properties to support more Afghan families and we hope to progress this soon. The government has recently announced the Afghan Citizen Resettlement scheme, and we will continue to work with our partners to support this scheme.

The property that is currently being made available is a private sector property, from an approach of a landlord that keenly wanted to help. It is important to recognise that we have a duty to those who have served and risked their lives for the safety of our country. Equally, we have duty to our own residents. Therefore it is important to make clear that the homes that have been offered have been made available from private sector owners for this specific purpose and it in no way detracts from our responsibility for housing our own residents in need of accommodation.

Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding partnership working, the Leader of the Council reassured Members that a priority needed to be a support network for those

arriving and the Council was working in partnership right across Hampshire and the South East. Across the South East, as at 1.00 pm on 6 September, 33 families had been settled, with 20 other offers awaiting matching.

Question 4

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Coastal Services, Cllr Steve Davies

Can the Portfolio Holder identify what the level of takings have been in the newly charged car parks in Totton compared to previous years (pre covid) and how much the meters cost to put in?

Answer:

Prior to 1st January 2021, parking in the two car parks were kept free as part of an agreement with Totton and Eling Town Council, the town council were making a contribution towards business rates for the car parks. However, no monies were received after October 2019 and in September 2020 the Portfolio holder took the decision to introduce charging in both car parks from 1 January 2021. The amount that had been paid in Business Rates up to that point was £28K.

Following the introduction of charging, parking meter machine income (which includes pay by phone) was £14,494.81 for the period ending August 2021. This gives an estimated annual income of about £25K.

In addition, a 'pro rata' allocation of parking clock income should be applied, giving an estimated clock income for both car parks of £66,720 based on allowing £398 for each short stay space and £158 for each long stay space (This figure is derived from dividing the short and long stay income overall by the number of spaces overall then apportioning an amount according to the number and type of each space in each car park – the 2 car parks have 120 long and 120 short stay spaces in total).

Overall predicted income for this calendar year from ticket machine and clock sales is therefore £25K + £66K = £91K for these two car parks.

The cost of installing 5 pay and display machines was £5K/machine = £25K. In addition, signage and lining etc was required giving a total cost of about £30K. All ticket machines are solar powered and have no mains connection.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on considering a break from charges, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that a number of free car parking days in the lead up to Christmas would be announced via the Town Council, offered by the District Council.

Question 5

From Cllr Mahmoud Kangarani to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Edward Heron

We often see highway activities or work being carried out by Hampshire County in our local area without the knowledge of local council or councillors.

Can the Leader of the Council look into this if communication between the interested parties including the District Council and Councillors can be improved?

Answer:

I would direct all councillors to the one.network website. This provides information on all programmed works on the highway, including non-emergency works by third-parties including utilities. If you register, for free, you can plot a geographical area, for example your Ward, and receive email alerts for all planned works, and the reference should you need to contact the organisation that does them.

I am aware though that there is a good working relationship between our operational Managers at NFDC and those at HCC and there is a dialog before works commence on the Highway if it is felt that those works would impact of the operation of District Council activities.