

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

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

In our area, violence without injury has risen by 419 incidents or 20%, theft from vehicles up by 158 incidents and rape increased by 32 incidents. These are appalling statistics made even worse by the fact that this period covers part of the two major lockdowns.

I wonder if the portfolio holder can explain exactly what is being done to stop local crime figures rising even further than they have over the past year and support our police to do their job properly?

Answer:

The Prevention and Detection of Crime within the District is primarily the responsibility of the Constabulary and I am pleased that Donna Jones, the Hampshire and the Isle of Wight's Police & Crime Commissioner has pledged an additional 600 uniformed Officers by 2023.

Through the Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group, the Council brings together key partner agencies, including the Police, Probation, Adult Services, Hampshire Fire and Rescue and Health services. Members of these organisations recognise the importance of working together in a co-ordinated manner, utilising resources to focus on both prevention, education and post-conviction interventions.

To obtain a greater understanding of emerging trends and vulnerabilities, the Council's Community Safety Team compiles an annual strategic assessment of crime and disorder in our area using data provided by our partners, which is published on the Safer New Forest Website. The crime data referred to within the 2020 assessment is captured from the period of April 1st 2019 until March 31st 2020 and therefore covers only 5 days of the first lockdown.

The 2020 assessment formulated the annual priorities which are published within the Partnership Plan of 2021 and cover 4 high level priorities:

- *Children at Risk*
- *Drug & Alcohol Related Harm*
- *Domestic Abuse*
- *Prevention of Risk & Exploitation of Vulnerable People*

The published Partnership Plan outlines the targeted work, activities and progress being undertaken by the Council and our partners in addressing these priorities. Each priority has a designated lead agency from within the strategic partnership who oversees the delivery of the action plan.

It is through the combined effort of the Safer New Forest partners that we are able to drive and effect change with responsible bodies and authorities, providing additional resources and support. It is with this combined and shared responsibility that we will continue to endeavour to make the New Forest a safe place to live, work and visit.

Notes – in response to a supplementary question on supporting the police with more staff in the Safer Communities team, it was highlighted that the Council provides significant support to crime prevention agencies through CCTV, working with partners to analyse trends and also working with communities to understand their priorities. The Leader of the Council answered this question in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing, Cllr Blunden.

Question 2

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Business, Tourism and High Streets, Cllr Michael Harris

Our own colleagues employed by the council, have worked very differently over the pandemic and of course are considering how best to work moving forward as are businesses right across the New Forest District. Could the portfolio holder please explain what is being done to support businesses in the area to adjust to working practices at this difficult time.

Answer:

The Council has given businesses across the district direct support through the awards of grants through ARG and the New Forest Rural Resilience and Rural SME Grant scheme. The Council has allocated £37.5 million in grants to over 2,500 recipient businesses. We continue to communicate with over 3,600 businesses each week through the business enews. This includes raising awareness of specific initiatives, training and support offered by partner organisations including Solent LEP which will include advice and support on different ways of working for those businesses that are needing support in this area. The benefits of this work have been noted by the LEP and they have reported high levels of up-take of these initiatives from New Forest businesses. Of course, most businesses have direct access to their own advisors, such as accountants, solicitors, bank managers, financial advisors and consultants to name but a few. Returning to my point about the 3,600 businesses who subscribe to our free weekly business enews. This does leave 4,400 businesses in the District who have not yet signed up for this valuable service. I would therefore take this opportunity to encourage them to visit the NFDC website and ensure that they hear about all business news, grants and information in the most effective and timely way. I thank Cllr Wade for providing me with the opportunity to publicise this valuable and yet free of charge service for New Forest businesses.

Question 3

From Cllr Keith Craze to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Infrastructure, Cllr Diane Andrews

I understand that the Council has received a request from the New Forest Recreation Management Steering Group to consider the introduction of a PSPO to help tackle the feeding of livestock, lighting of fires and BBQ's and out of control dogs on the open Forest, what steps has the Portfolio Holder taken to consider this request?

Answer:

The Council has received a request from the New Forest Recreation Management Steering Group to consider the introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO). Initial investigations have taken to establish how these Orders are being used elsewhere. There have been a number of discussions with other Councils who are using these powers. Officers are working closely with Forestry England and there are on going discussions to agree if PSPOs are made how they would be monitored and enforced. It is critical that there

is a full understand of the resources needed to manage any PSPOs and a full understanding of the measures that need to be in place once a PSPO is served. The PSPO can be enforced by the Police, Council enforcement officers, or any other authorised officers. Without adequate resources to enforce an Order will not achieve the outcome that the RMS has identified.

The Council will continue to work closely with Forestry England to progress this work. I have set up a Member Panel so that progress on what is a complex project can be reported back on a regular basis. I am sure Councillor Craze that you and the rest of the Council will be hearing more from me on this matter over the coming months as the work progresses. I am pleased with the progress that has been made to date and confident that through strong partnership working we will reduce the impact the unwanted behaviour is having on the environment of the district.

Note – in response to supplementary question on responsible off lead dog walking, it was confirmed that any potential PSPO would only target those who were not in control of their dogs and it would not seek to prevent off lead dog walking.

Question 4

From Cllr David Hawkins to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Coastal Services, Cllr Steve Davies

There is a significant amount of work being carried out on the Milford On Sea front again. Is this more emergency work and can you please inform me who is paying this bill?

Answer:

The work currently being undertaken at Milford-on-Sea is maintenance of the timber groynes. This is being undertaken as part of the annual planned maintenance programme on our coastal defence assets.

It is not emergency works and is being funded through the Council's coastal maintenance budget.

A point of interest is that the timbers being used were excess to requirements at BCP who offered them to us free of charge. I like to think of this as an excellent example of collaboration between Christchurch Bay Strategy partners.

Question 5

From Cllr Neil Tungate to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Coastal Services, Cllr Steve Davies

We are aware the Hurst Castle is undergoing some significant restoration. Can you explain when the work will be completed and will it endure further extreme weather and rising sea levels?

Answer:

The work being carried out to the Castle defences is being led by English Heritage. The Council does not have full oversight of their work programme, but is aware of the next phase of their planned works which will commence in the near future. This will involve importing further shingle and rebuilding of the temporary rock structure around the east wing. I'm not in a position to comment on the long-term viability of the defence works.

I will add that the coastal officers were invited to visit the site and viewed the resin injection process being used to stabilise the foundations. I'm no civil engineer, but perhaps this 21st century solution might offer protection at other historic sites?

In considering the wider strategic approach to the future management of this area the Council is engaging with English Heritage and others who own land at Hurst Spit to consider options for future management of this area. Any works will be designed taking into account the impact of climate change. Hurst Spit itself is being considered across both coastal strategies currently in progress across our coastal frontage – these are the Christchurch Bay Strategy and the Hurst to Lymington Strategy.

Question 6

From Cllr Emma Lane to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Edward Heron

Following the decision of Council on the 11th October to support the campaign for the introduction of an Average Speed Camera system on the B3078 Roger Penny Way, can the Leader provide an update on what steps have been taken to progress this important issue?

Answer:

Following the October Council meeting I wrote to the Official Verderer, Police & Crime Commissioner and Leader of the County Council requesting a meeting to agree how this may be progressed. This has now been arranged to take place in January and will include representatives of the National Park Authority, Forestry England and Natural England.

This meeting will bring together senior representatives of all the statutory organisations required to deliver an Average Speed Camera system, Police, Highways Authority, landowner, planning and regulatory. I am confident that this will be a significant step forward in tackling the high number of animal casualties on this road.

I would just take this opportunity to express my thanks to the Police for 'Operation Mountie'. Working with partners, including this Council, last week this operation on the B3078 saw the Camera Van catch 53 drivers exceeding the speed limit, including one caught overtaking at over 50mph. In addition one car was seized for being driven without a valid licence and another driver reported for having no insurance. 10 other drivers were spoken to and educated on the importance of staying under the speed limit within the Forest.