

**FULL COUNCIL – 12 DECEMBER 2022 – QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS  
UNDER STANDING ORDER 22A**

**First Questions**

**Question 1**

**From Cllr Michael Thierry to the Portfolio Holder for Business, Tourism and High Streets, Cllr Michael Harris OBE**

Will Councillor Michael Harris OBE, New Forest District Council Portfolio Holder for Business, Tourism and High Streets update the Council on the success of the recent initiatives to encourage greater spending in local high streets?

Can he outline, going forward, what will be the programme to encourage continued local shop support in the coming months?

*Answer:*

*There have been a series of recent initiatives designed to encourage greater spend in the local high streets, which include the following:-*

*A joint marketing campaign run throughout 2022 via Go New Forest website promoting local high street shopping. This will be repeated in 2023.*

*The Council ran the successful 2022 Shop Doctor programme which supported 82 high street businesses, providing participating businesses with impartial feedback. This helped to raise standards and improve the customer experience, increase foot-fall and the spend in town and village centres.*

*For the first time this year we ran a campaign throughout November to promote shopping in local high streets in support of the national campaign called Small Business Saturday, held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December. This was supported with free parking in all NFDC high street car parks. There was extensive promotion across all Council channels to raise awareness of the importance of supporting local high streets. This included pictures of myself and the Chairman supporting local businesses. I was also interviewed by BBC Radio Solent on the importance of our high streets.*

*Given the success of the Shop Doctor Programme, this initiative will be run again in 2023. 80 high street businesses across 5 New Forest towns and villages will be able to benefit from this.*

*To better understand how we can support our high streets going forward we have commissioned a retail consultant to undertake visitor experience surveys of the high streets in Totton and Fordingbridge. This will provide valuable information to inform future initiatives.*

*It is also important to note that the different teams throughout the Council support our local high streets, by keeping them clean and well maintained and ensure that businesses meet relevant safety standards, this all helps to encourage residents and visitors to shop locally.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on visiting Ringwood to meet with local councillors to discuss these initiatives, the Portfolio Holder was pleased to accept the invitation.*

## **Question 2**

### **From Cllr Mahmoud Kangarani to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Infrastructure, Cllr Diane Andrews**

Now that the government have been forced to climb down from imposing compulsory housing targets on local authorities, what difference will it make here in the New Forest?

*Answer:*

*The Government has indicated that it will consult on proposed changes to the methodology for calculating housing need over the next few weeks, it is suggested that the consultation will be published before Christmas. The consultation will be in the form of revised wording to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council will consider the consultation once published and respond accordingly. At this stage there is very little else I can say.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the possible relaxation of meeting planning targets as part of the Planning Committee process, the Portfolio Holder reiterated that there was very little else to say until the details of the consultation were made available.*

## **Question 3**

### **From Cllr David Harrison to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

Britain is one of the most depleted nature countries in the world. What are the Conservatives up to, designating Dibden Bay as a Freeport?

*Answer:*

*The designation of the land at Dibden Bay as a tax site within the Solent Freeport does not change or impact on the environmental designation of this land. The tax incentives through Freeport designation can only be realised if there is something there. As has been discussed a number of times, any development on this site will need planning permission either from the District Council or the Secretary of State depending on the scale of the development. As and when there is a proposal, the impact of the development on the environment will be fully assessed. Designation as a tax site within the Freeport in no way changes or impacts on this process.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on Freeport status being an enabling measure for development, the Leader reiterated that as and when there was a proposal, the impact of the development on the environment would be fully assessed.*

## **Question 4**

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

Many people across our district are struggling with the increased cost of living, especially high energy bills. Can the portfolio holder tell me how much of the grant funding for warm banks has been allocated so far and which areas have received that money?

*Answer:*

*Before answering, the Portfolio Holder reminded all councillors and residents of the information available on the Council's website regarding cost of living – at <https://www.newforest.gov.uk/costofliving>*

So far, we have awarded 16 grant payments, totalling £13,220, to a range of organisations who have opened up a warm space, covering the whole district, including:-

- Totton Spiritualist Church – Totton
- Lyndhurst Community Association – Lyndhurst
- Our Lady of Sorrows – Fordingbridge
- Fawley Parish Council – Fawley
- Hordle Community Association – Hordle
- Sway – Sway
- Avonway Community Centre – Fordingbridge
- Blackfield Baptist Church – Blackfield
- Whitsbury Village Hall – Whitsbury
- St Winfrids Church – Testwood
- St Andrews Church – Hythe and Dibden
- Milford On Sea Community Centre – Milford On Sea
- Burley Parish Council – Burley
- Martin Club – Martin
- Youth and Families Matter – Totton
- Copythorne Parish Hall – Copythorne

*These however provide more opportunities than just a warm space, bringing communities together. I would encourage all Members to signpost residents to these facilities where necessary.*

*In addition, there are more than those listed with funding from the District Council active across the area.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the outstanding funds being allocated to developing a Deprivation Strategy, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the need to be able to adapt and react to changing circumstances in committing finances, as has been required over the last few years.*

## **Question 5**

### **From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Coastal Services, Cllr Steve Davies**

What has the District Council done, or will be doing, to encourage and facilitate residents to reduce their carbon footprint?

Answer:

*The Council is doing positive work across various services to ensure that residents in the District can access information and advice about ways of making their properties more energy efficient reducing carbon footprint. The Council's housing department has also run a cost of living campaign on how to save energy and the planning department offers advice across social media on EV Solar Panels. Through our place shaping role the Council has, and will continue to ensure that we shape our communities in a way that reduces residents' carbon footprint, building homes and employment within existing settlements with easy access to facilities supported by good walking and cycling routes.*

*The current Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan is being updated and I am looking forward to sharing with you a number of exciting initiatives when we report to Cabinet in February with the annual review.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the collective effort needed to reduce carbon footprint, the Portfolio Holder agreed that residents, businesses and the Council would need to work together on these initiatives.*

## **Question 6**

### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness Services, Cllr Edward Heron**

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm how many residents and families we have registered as Homeless, on the Housing waiting list and in temporary accommodation? Also, can the Portfolio Holder advise on how many of these families in temporary accommodation have raised concerns about the lack of suitability to their needs?

*Answer:*

*Referring to the November Cabinet report on Homelessness, Members will be aware of the current demands for social housing and homelessness services in the district has been considerable. There are currently 1,566 applicant households on the Housing Register. 576 of these applicants are single people. In more recent times there are, on average, approximately 400 houses made available in the Council area each year, as a mixture of Council and registered provider housing.*

*There are 397 households whom the Council owes a duty of care to secure accommodation. These households will largely live in one of our stock of Private Sector Lease (PSL) properties or the Council's own stock of properties used for temporary accommodation, until such time as they secure permanent accommodation. Half of these duties have been awarded in the last 18 months.*

*There are 38 households in emergency accommodation not owned by the Council, which is largely a mix of HMO or flat accommodation, with a further 7 families and 23 single people in hotel accommodation. 25 of these households have a firm offer of accommodation, either through the housing register or through private sector leasing.*

*Of those currently living in Emergency or Temporary Accommodation, the Council's Reviewing Officer has upheld 3 household's requests for a review of the suitability of their accommodation, whilst 2 reviews are pending.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on a review of the suitability of existing temporary and short term accommodation, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the importance of bringing any individual cases to his attention. Regarding the wider implications of the question, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the changing nature of demand in temporary accommodation towards an increase in families, to which the Council was responding. He concluded by encouraging Members to contact the Council's Homelessness team with any concerns they may have within their communities over the Christmas period and beyond.*