

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 1 February 2023)

1. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (MINUTE NO 62)

The Leader was delighted to be receiving at the meeting the initial findings of an independent survey with New Forest residents. The survey shows strong performance for the authority against national benchmarks, along with some areas for improvement. The Council wants to be an evidence based Council using data and insight to ensure that resources are spent wisely. The Cabinet will look at the feedback from our residents in setting the Council's priorities moving forwards.

The Leader reported that work will continue with partners in the cost of living steering group to understand how to target our work together. She was pleased to report that funding had been awarded to over 15 New Forest organisations to contribute to the costs of setting up and running warm spaces this winter.

The Council is working to support local businesses and in January launched a new free scheme offering start-up support with over 17 New Forest residents and businesses already benefiting from advice and guidance. The new Platinum Jubilee Business Park, opening in the spring is already over one third let.

January has seen the launch of the 2023 New Forest Shop Doctor programme. This aims to improve the customer experience in town centres throughout the New Forest through a series of 'Mystery Shopper' visits. This year's programme is available to independent retail and hospitality businesses in Hythe, Lyndhurst, New Milton and Barton, as well as Milford on Sea and Brockenhurst. 70 businesses to date have been recruited to participate.

2. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT (BASED ON PERFORMANCE APRIL TO DECEMBER INCLUSIVE 2022) (MINUTE NO 66)

The Cabinet noted the latest budgets forecasts of the General Fund, Capital and Housing Revenue Account, set out in paragraphs 4-6 of the Cabinet Report 4 of the Cabinet agenda.

The updated General Fund Budget takes into account all new reportable variations, at £21.373 million, an overall increase of £699,000 from the original budget estimate. The Capital Programme has been marginally reduced to £41.599 million for the year.

The Housing Revenue account has faced some pressures over the year to date, and these have been reported in previous monitoring reports, however a further budget adjustment of £190,000 is required. This results in an overall net additional budget requirement of £1.602 million. This budget deficit is expected to need to be funded from reserves, and therefore reducing the funding available in future years. The pressures of inflation, increasing service demands and new service pressures will have an impact on the Council's ability to repay existing debt and is likely to require increased borrowing in order to fund future capital programmes.

3. CEMETERIES PROVISION (MINUTE NO 67)

The Cabinet approved that, in order to meet predicted future interment needs, officers carry out further work to progress the expansion of interment provision of Calshot cemetery, including a new budget of £60,000 to facilitate the work, and that officers continue discussions with landowners of the adjacent and adjoining land identified at Milford Cemetery. The Cabinet also approved to progress a review of

eight closed churchyards and two additional nearing closure, to ensure the liabilities and risks are in compliance with legislation and to progress options for cremated remains columbaria and identify the most appropriate locations in cemeteries.

The Cabinet recognise the need to plan a way forward for future cemetery provision, ensuring the terms of the Local Government Act 1972 are adhered to and that the needs and trends relating to interment in the New Forest until at least 2040 are met. This can be met through the extension of existing cemeteries or new sites. Two cemeteries have been identified as having potential for extension, Milford Road, New Milton and Calshot.

At the Cabinet Meeting, Members expressed their support to the recommendations in the report, highlighting the role of the service and the importance of planning future cemetery provision.

4. RESIDENT INSIGHT (MINUTE NO 68)

The Cabinet supported the next steps following the completion of an independent Resident Insight Survey being carried out and outlined within the Cabinet report 6 of the Cabinet agenda, this includes a two-yearly resident survey to be carried out as well as sharing findings and anonymised data with partners.

The purpose of the resident insight survey is to better understand residents in terms of behaviours, perceptions, expectations and needs over time. The collection of data will help the Council to take an intelligent approach to inform decision making, policy development and service delivery.

760 interviews were conducted with residents aged 18 and over and sample quotas were set on the population profile of NFDC by gender, age, working status as well as ward.

The key findings are set out in section 5 of Cabinet report 6 of the Cabinet agenda and include information and statistics on for example, service satisfaction, internet use, customer contact, recycling and community safety.

The Cabinet note that the survey information will provide a good background to shape future service design, delivery and strategic objectives. An action plan will be developed in order to help realise the benefits of the data and enable implementation of the next steps.

At the Cabinet meeting, Members acknowledged the value in conducting a survey in order to ascertain the views of residents. The results are positive which is a credit to the work of officers delivering the Council's services in challenging times.

The Cabinet request that their thanks be passed to those officers involved in the Resident Insight Survey.

5. CLIMATE CHANGE & NATURE EMERGENCY ANNUAL UPDATE 2023 (MINUTE NO 69)

The Cabinet acknowledged the activities undertaken and progress made in 2022, in relation to the declared Climate Change and Nature Emergency; it acknowledged the role the authority has in supporting National Government policy and working with partners and the public to ensure all to understand and pay their part. The Cabinet approved the Climate Change and Nature Emergency Action Plan 2023, attached as Appendix 5 to Cabinet Report 7 of the Cabinet agenda. The Cabinet also supported the strategic direction of the NFDC's climate action and agreed to set a 5-year

Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028 in the summer, in accordance with the revised Corporate Plan.

The Cabinet note the work carried out since the first Climate Change and Nature Action Plan published in February 2022 and the three priorities programmes of activity – Carbon Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Nature Recovery.

It is recognised that in order to have the maximum outcomes and to deliver the best value for money, the District Council needs to act in partnership with neighbours and sector peers. Section 4 of Cabinet report 7 of the Cabinet agenda sets out the baseline data which would be used in order to set targets and to monitor progress.

A one-off budget of £500,000 has been included in the draft Capital Programme for 2022/23 to support the delivery of the Climate Change and Nature Emergency Action Plan. It is proposed that the Capital Programme for 2023/24-2025/26 includes an annual sum of £250,000 to further support the work.

At the Cabinet meeting, Members expressed their support to the report confirming the importance of reducing impact on the environment and to adopt a more sustainable approach.

Members suggested that a briefing be provided to all councillors after the election on the climate change and nature emergency and actions being undertaken to address this.

6. COMMUNITY GRANTS (MINUTE NO 70)

The Cabinet, having noted support from the Community, Partnerships and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and the detailed work and considerations of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group, approved Community Grant awards totalling £129,600 in revenue grants and £92,000 in capital grants for inclusion in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2023/24. The detailed awards are outlined in Appendices 1 and 2 to Cabinet Report 8 of the Cabinet Agenda.

Community Transport grant awards were approved. This totalled £50,027 and supported three transportation projects; Wheels to work, Call and Go, and Group Hire.

The Cabinet also approved a number of proposed changes to the process for applications for the financial year 2024/25, as detailed in the Cabinet report. These include a minimum grant application of £1,000 (an increase of £400), an amendment to the application form to include a question regarding whether a District of County Councillor grant has been sought, and consideration regarding whether to develop and agree a Service Level Agreement with New Forest Disability Information Service in order to formalise the working relationship and agree target outcomes.

At the Cabinet meeting, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group expressed his thanks to the officers involved in the community grant process for their help and support.

7. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES – SCHEME TO APPLY FROM 1 APRIL 2023 (MINUTE NO 71)

The Council is required annually to make a scheme of members' allowances, which must be published.

The current scheme, proposed to be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2023, provides for the annual adjustment of allowances (basis, special responsibility, and

dependant carers' allowances) by the Local Government staff employees' national pay award annual percentage increase.

The employee's national pay award for 2023/24 is still being negotiated, however if an award is made, it will automatically, under the terms of the scheme be backdated to 1 April 2023. No other changes are possible without a recommendation from the Independent Remuneration Panel. Following the new Council in May, a further review of Members' allowances is proposed to be carried out, likely to be in 2024.

RECOMMENDED:

That the current scheme of members' allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2023.

8. ASSET MAINTENANCE & REPLACEMENT PROGRAMME AND GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 (MINUTE NO 72)

The Cabinet agreed the schedule of projects, as included at Appendix 1 and 2 to Cabinet report 10 of the Cabinet Agenda, noting the commitment for expenditure beyond 2023/24 whereby a project commences in 2023/24 and extends into future years, for adoption by the Council. The Cabinet also agreed the vehicle and plant replacement programme for a two-year period, covering purchases due in 2023/24 and 2024/25, for adoption by the Council.

The proposed capital programme for 2023/24 totals £15.032 million, including outline financing, as included within Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report. The report highlights project proposals for a 3-year period. This includes the lead in time for the vehicles and plant acquisition programme, where the programme costs for 23/24 and 24/25 sought approval now, in order to enable the necessary work to commence in the year prior to when the new vehicles and plant will be delivered. Funding for the new Depot site has also been earmarked over the period 2023/24 and 2024/25. This is for a new depot at Hardley Industrial Estate, as a replacement for the new Claymeadow depot. This scheme is subject to Cabinet approval of a business case.

At the Cabinet meeting, a Cabinet Member spoke about the importance of investing and maintaining the Council's assets, highlighting the proposed long-term commitment to invest £7 million in a new modern, efficient depot at Hardley.

RECOMMENDED:

(a) That the schedule of projects, as included at Appendix 1 and 2 of the Cabinet report 10 of the Cabinet agenda be approved within the 2023/24 budget, noting this commits the Council to expenditure beyond 23/24 whereby a project commences in 2023/24 and extends into future years: and

(b) That the Vehicle and Plant replacement programme be approved for a 2-year period, covering purchases due in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

9. CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/24 (MINUTE NO 73)

The Cabinet agreed the Capital Strategy 2023/24, as outlined in Cabinet Report 11 of the Cabinet Agenda, including the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement, for adoption by the Council.

The Capital Strategy confirms at a high level what the Council is intending to spend its money on over the medium term and how it intends to finance this expenditure. Over the period covered by 2023/24 to 2025/26, total capital expenditure is forecast at around £139 million.

The Cabinet report sets out that the Council is initially intending to utilise the cash balances it has accrued to deliver the various adopted strategies, including the acquisition and development of Commercial Property. It will also supplement internal resources, when necessary, with external borrowing and in accordance with advice it receives from its contracted Treasury Management experts. Based on the current set of prudential indicators, that external borrowing will be required each year from 2023/24.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Capital Strategy 2023/24 be approved, including the adoption of the MRP statement as set out below:

“For capital expenditure that has been incurred, and which has given rise to a CFR, the MRP policy for expenditure other than that incurred on investment property and dwellings, shall be to charge revenue an amount equal to the depreciation of any asset financed by loan. The MRP policy specific to investment properties and dwellings financed by loan, shall be to charge revenue an amount equivalent to the sum of borrowing utilised, over a repayment period of 50 years.”

10. DELEGATION OF POWERS TO OFFICERS (MINUTE NO 74)

The Cabinet approved changes to the Council’s Scheme of Delegation of Powers to Officers as a result of recent changes to the Council’s staffing structures. This replaces all references to “Executive Head” with “Strategic Director” and includes a new delegation to “Assistant Director” in respect of all powers currently delegations to Strategic Directors, Service Managers, and all other Council officers.

**COUNCILLOR J CLEARY
CHAIRMAN**