

9 OCTOBER 2023

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 9 October 2023.

- * Cllr Neville Penman (Chairman)
- * Cllr David Hawkins (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Alan Alvey
- * Peter Armstrong
- * Geoffrey Blunden
- * Hilary Brand
- * Mark Clark
- * Steve Clarke
- * Jill Cleary
- * Keith Craze
- * Kate Crisell
- * Sean Cullen
- * Jack Davies
- Steve Davies
- * Philip Dowd
- * Barry Dunning
- * Jacqui England
- * Allan Glass
- David Harrison
- * Matthew Hartmann
- John Haywood
- * Jeremy Heron
- Nigel Linford
- * Patrick Mballa
- * Colm McCarthy

Councillors:

- * David Millar
- Neil Millington
- * Ian Murray
- Alan O'Sullivan
- Stephanie Osborne
- * Adam Parker
- * Dave Penny
- * Dan Poole
- * Caroline Rackham
- * Alvin Reid
- * Joe Reilly
- * Janet Richards
- * Barry Rickman
- * Steve Rippon-Swaine
- * John Sleep
- * Michael Thierry
- * Derek Tipp
- * Neil Tungate
- * Alex Wade
- * Malcolm Wade
- * Christine Ward
- * Phil Woods
- * Richard Young

*Present

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Grainne O'Rourke, Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Chris Noble, Daniel Reynafarje, Karen Wardle and Matt Wisdom.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs S Davies, Harrison, Haywood, Linford, O'Sullivan and Osborne.

37 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023, be confirmed.

Note – Cllr M Wade referred to the absence of a response to a previous Portfolio Holder question, which he had expected to receive from the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing. Whilst the Portfolio Holder highlighted that the question had already been put and answered only a few months prior, he would recirculate that answer to councillors in due course.

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests by Members.

39 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Middle East Conflict

The Chairman expressed the Council's solidarity with innocent civilians in the middle east, in light of the ongoing violence in the region. As the Council met this evening, its thoughts were with all those affected.

Members noted that the Council would continue to work with partners to support local communities, recognising the impact of these recent events.

Former Cllr Graham Wales

The Chairman referred with great sadness to the recent passing of former Cllr Graham Wales. Graham was first elected in 1983 to the Lymington Town ward and served continuously for 12 years, until 1995.

Graham served most notably on the Policy and Resources and Housing Committees. He was Vice-Chairman of the Housing Committee from 1987 to 1989. He represented the District Council on a number of local outside bodies including the Lymington Harbour Commissioners and Lymington CAB.

The Chairman extended his sincere condolences to Graham's family and friends and placed on record the Council's thanks for his service to the District.

Engagements

The Chairman reported on the following engagements that had taken place since the last Council meeting:-

13 September

He attended the Civic Day of the Mayor of Christchurch and was provided a guided walking tour, taking in some historical points presented by the Christchurch History Society. There was also an escorted tour of Christchurch Priory, where volunteers discussed the story of the Priory which went back to at least the middle of the 11th century.

14 September

The Mayor of Test Valley hosted a Showcasing Event. This involved a great presentation and interesting tour of the Army Flying Museum.

19 September

He attended the Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council Civic Afternoon. There was an introductory meeting with the collections House Manager, Dominique Shemby and then a tour of Vyne House and Gardens.

21 September

He attended the grand opening of Namaste Hub dementia unit and cut the ribbon to officially open the Hub at Carpathia Grange in Hythe. Meeting the staff and residents was extremely rewarding and interesting.

29 September

Applemore Leisure Centre was the location of the NFDC Charity Football Tournament on 29 September. The Chairman enjoyed presenting a trophy to the winning team from Revenues and Benefits. This raised money for the Minstead Trust.

1 October

He attended a traditional harvest thanksgiving in Winchester, bringing together traditions, readings, hymns and choral music. A donation was also provided towards the Winchester Food Bank. This was followed by the Winchester Green Week Gathering. The Chair, Jo Crocker and Cadet Lizzy Kitchenside of Salvation Army provided a talk, and the cathedral girls choir and renowned soprano Lucy Hole sang. The Winchesters Dance Team also took part.

7 October

He attended the Mayor of Basingstoke and Deane's Variety Show, with funds raised in support of the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

8 October

He attended the High Sheriff of Hampshire's Law Sunday Service.

9 October

The Chairman joined Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal at Avon Tyrell – UK Youth's Outdoor Learning Centre. A charity which seeks to equip young people to thrive at early stages of their lives.

40 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

Coastal

The Council continued to work tirelessly to protect the local and global environment. 4,500 tonnes of shingle was being added to Milford-on-Sea beach, to improve beach levels and help protect the seawall ahead of the winter. This would also include the repair of three groynes located opposite the Needles Eye Café. The Coastal Team expected the work to take several weeks, depending on tidal and weather conditions. The Council continued to work with partners on the vital

Flooding and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategies which together covered the most vulnerable sections of the District's coastline, from the border with Christchurch to Lymington.

Garden Waste

Later in October, subscriptions would open for the Council's new wheeled bin garden waste service. This was the first step of the transformation of waste and recycling services. Bins would be rolled out to customers after Christmas, with collections due to start in April next year.

Fly tipping

As a great example of partnership working last month, members of the Council's Environmental Enforcement Team worked closely with colleagues from Hampshire Police, Forestry England, the National Park Authority and Lyndhurst and Minstead Parish Councils, spending a morning in Lyndhurst checking vehicles and waste carriers licences, as part of the efforts to reduce fly tipping. Out of 89 vehicles checked, eight notices were issued to vehicles.

41 REPORT OF CABINET - 4 OCTOBER 2023

PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 4 October 2023.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

ITEM 3 – MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2023 ONWARDS

Cllr Heron introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

A Member expressed his concern at the impact of the national Government's approach to local government finances and the consequential pressures on balancing annual budgets. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the Council remained in a strong financial position, notwithstanding the challenges ahead and this strong position was achieved by the administration's long term approach to financial planning. A number of Members further to this commented on the importance of retaining a prudent level of reserves, in playing an important part in the overall financial sustainability of the Council.

A Member highlighted the future approach to the setting of fees and charges, and welcomed further clarity at some stage on the programme for any Portfolio Holder Decisions in this area.

In responding to the debate, the Portfolio Holder welcomed any specific technical questions outside of the meeting which he would be happy to respond to.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve:-

- (a) That the revised MTFP forecasts, as outlined within the Cabinet report and appendices be adopted;
- (b) That the options identified to close the budget gap for 2024/25 and through to 2027/28 are developed further;
- (c) That the Fees and Charges Policy set out in section 4f of the Cabinet report be adopted; and
- (d) That the reporting timeline as set out in section 6 of the Cabinet report be agreed.

ITEM 4 – ANNUAL FEES AND CHARGES FOR 2024 – CAR PARKING AND KEYHAVEN MOORINGS

Cllr Blunden introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

Cllr M Wade spoke with concern about the significance of the increase in the charges and the impact on local residents and moved an amendment on the parking clock prices, as follows:-

Short stay annual clocks from £30.00 to £32.00
Long stay annual clocks from £140.00 to £150.00
Long stay quarterly clocks from £40.00 to £43.00

Cllr J Davies seconded the amendment.

Members speaking for the amendment referred to the percentage increases and highlighted specifically the impact on local businesses that purchased clocks for their employees. Concerns were also raised on the impact to on street parking. With inflation and cost of living pressures, it was suggested that wages were not keeping up with this level of increase to local fees and charges.

Members speaking against the amendment encouraged councillors to consider the figures as well as the percentages. A number of Members suggested that the New Forest District Council, with its unique parking clock initiative, remained one of the best councils in respect of value for money car parking for residents and local businesses, in the country.

The Portfolio Holder, in responding to the debate on the amendment highlighted that in his view, it was commendable that the Council had been able to freeze charges for so long, in some cases for eight years. Whilst percentage rises could generate headlines, he encouraged Members to look at the individual figures and the benchmarking undertaken with other local authorities. He highlighted the retention of the first hour of parking remaining at £1 to support local high streets and the Council remaining far cheaper overall to park with, than a number of other local areas.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

The Council further debated the substantive motion.

Put to the vote, the substantive motion was carried.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve:-

- (a) that the 2024 town & village and amenity car park tariffs be increased by £1.00 per tariff, except for the 1-hour tariff which will remain at £1.00, and the “up to 20 hours” tariff which will increase by £3.
- (b) that the 1-hour tariff is applicable in all car parks throughout the year.
- (c) that the increase in charges for NFDC parking clocks be agreed; namely;
 - Short stay annual clocks from £30.00 to £40.00
 - Long stay annual clocks from £140.00 to £220.00
 - Long stay quarterly clocks from £40.00 to £65.00
- (d) that the Council allocate 4 days of free parking in town centre car parks to support local businesses during December 2023, as detailed in section 7 of the Cabinet report.
- (e) that the Keyhaven fees and charges as detailed at Appendix A to the Cabinet report be approved.

42 REPORT OF PLACE AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 14 SEPTEMBER 2023

Cllr Rippon-Swaine introduced the report of the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel of 14 September 2023, and moved the adoption of the recommendations. In doing so, he highlighted that the Climate and Ecology Bill was yet to receive a second reading in parliament and the Panel sought further information on the financial implications of the Bill. It was recommended that, at the appropriate time, a Task and Finish Group be established to monitor the Bill's progress through parliament and to understand those wider implications. Cllr Reid seconded the motion.

Cllr M Wade moved an amendment, to include the following addition to the proposed resolution:-

“That the Council write to MPs Sir Julian Lewis and Sir Desmond Swayne to inform them that the motion has been passed, urging them to sign up to support the Bill, or thanking them for already doing so; and

That the Council write to Zero Hour, the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the Bill, expressing its support.”

In moving the amendment, Cllr M Wade spoke of the importance of taking action in addition to declaring support in principle. He highlighted the growing concern of extreme climate incidents in the UK and the need to act swiftly. Cllr Clark, seconded the amendment. He spoke of the delays to the Council declaring a Climate and Nature Emergency and the need to show leadership on the issue.

The Council debated the amendment. Those speaking for highlighted the ease of writing to the local MPs on the issue at this stage and the need to show leadership on the content of the Bill. Those speaking against highlighted the proposals from the Panel, wishing to take carefully into account the overall implications of the Bill,

whilst supporting it in principle, and this did not take away from the Council's ongoing response to the Climate and Nature Emergency through its Climate and Nature Action Plan. Concerns were raised that climate initiatives needed to be very carefully considered, particularly those that might place additional financial burdens on the community.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

The Council then voted on the substantive motion of the report, which was carried.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council support the proposed Climate and Ecology Bill in principle; and
- (b) That a Task and Finish Group be created to monitor the progress of the Climate and Ecology Bill through Parliament and explore the detail of the Bill.

43 QUESTIONS

Questions were put and answered under Standing Order 22, as follows:-

- From Cllr Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron on Anti-fraud.
- From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on businesses in the New Forest.
- From Cllr M Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on support to the Armed Forces.
- From Cllr Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron, on the award of large contracts.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on Freedom Leisure swimming arrangements.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on Freedom Leisure swimming arrangements.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on Freedom Leisure swimming arrangements.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on permitted development legislation.

Note: A copy of the full questions and replies are attached to these minutes.

44 NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chairman confirmed that he would allow the motion to be dealt with at the meeting, as he considered it convenient to the despatch of business.

In accordance with Standing Order 21, Cllr Rackham then moved the following motion:-

"This Council recognises the nature of any decisions it makes in relation to finance, crime and the environment in how it impacts the current residents of the district but does not consider the impact on the future generation of residents or the youth of today of these or any other factors.

This Council notes the youth of today are the electors of tomorrows, whose views on how the Council manages the district are vitally important so it is essential that policies and plans take into account additional generational factors such as social, environmental and wellbeing changes as well in relation to the next generations of council tax payers.

The Council recognises other local and regional governments take this into account already, including the Welsh Sennydd and encourage young people to be part of the democratic processes which will shape their world, encouraging active participation and contribution.

Therefore I propose every decision taken by New Forest District Council is considered in terms of the impact on future generations, in the same way that decisions are considered in terms of impact regarding environment, finance and crime.

In many ways we are caretakers of our district, hoping to improve life for our residents but leave our district a better place for future generations. But questions regarding the impact of decisions we make now on future residents are not asked. We are not usually told about any impact on future generations as part of our discussions unless there is a particular relevance. Portfolio Holders currently do not need to record that impact on the decision outlines.

I would suggest that our decisions should be specifically considered in terms of their impact on generations into the future, to ensure we are not leaving our future residents with poor decisions made for short-term purposes. Other local and regional governments take this into account already, including the Welsh Sennydd and if we are to encourage young people to be part of the democratic processes which will shape their world, we surely need to start by considering how our own decisions will impact on future generations.”

Cllr J Davies seconded the motion. In doing so, he highlighted the need to safeguard future generations through decision making by ensuring that all policies and decisions were considered in the context of their impact on younger people.

The Council debated the motion.

The Leader highlighted the opportunity to consider how the new Corporate Plan might address the needs of future generations in the District and that this was subject to Member involvement and decision making in due course.

Those speaking in favour of the motion considered that a specific requirement to consider these issues could only serve as a useful additional prompt, in areas such as planning and HR, with particular reference to the Council's ageing workforce.

A number of Members spoke on the work already taking place across the Council, in support of future generations, from the work on the Climate and Nature Action Plan and its long term view, to the Local Plan and its 20 year timeframe, reviewed every five years. Initiatives in housing were also noted such as Greener Housing, Starter Homes and Shared Ownership, as was the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

Those speaking against the motion expressed concern that it implied that the Council did not already take into account these issues, and indeed the wider

community impact of all decisions. Some councillors highlighted the importance of taking into account all issues connected with a decision, and this need not be expressly highlighted in separate assessments, but implicit in the overall evidence base and reasons for taking any decision.

Cllr Rackham responded to the debate and welcomed the work underway across the Council in support of future generations. However, it was suggested that the step requested by the motion would only serve as an additional opportunity to promote this work taking place, and prompt further consideration of the impact of the Council's work on future generations.

Put to the vote, the motion was lost.

45 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cllr Brand replace Cllr Rackham on the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- (b) That Cllr Rackham replace Cllr Brand on the Audit Committee.

CHAIRMAN

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FULL COUNCIL – 9 OCTOBER 2023 – QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron

Why doesn't the District Council employ a full-time anti-fraud officer? The post under question being the Corporate Fraud and Compliance Officer - currently a part time post.

Answer:

The Council is committed to preventing and detecting fraud and everyone connected with the Council has a responsibility to be fraud aware and report any potential fraud.

The majority of fraud work, including staffing, was transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions in 2016 as part of their Single Fraud Investigation Service initiative. We work closely with the DWP as part of a joint working partnership to investigate fraud, including predominately Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. We retained a part-time dedicated Corporate Fraud and Compliance Officer who works corporately across the council, to investigate all referrals and reports received, to promote and raise awareness, and to ensure steps are taken to prevent fraud and error. The annual internal audit plan provides independent assurance on the council's control environment, and appropriately trained fraud staff within the partnership are on hand to support the Council as required.

An annual fraud report is overseen by the Council's Audit Committee, with the last report presented on 31 May 2023. This report highlighted the range of activities and initiatives undertaken, the outcomes of investigations, and the proactive steps we take to prevent and detect fraud.

With this collective Council wide responsibility, current workloads of the specific officer are manageable with the resource available.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing, in the absence of Cllr Harrison.

Question 2

From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp

With Prezzo leaving Lyndhurst and another Lyndhurst restaurant gone bust and closed last week, can the Portfolio Holder tell us how many businesses have failed in the New Forest in 2022/23?

Answer:

I am sorry but I am not able to give you that information because we get this from the Office for National Statistics and they have not produced the figures for 2022/23 yet. We expect this to be available in November.

Business obviously involves risks, as there are so many problems that can arise. If we look at statistics, we must interpret those very carefully to understand the situation.

We all know our highstreets are undergoing significant changes due to a number of pressures, including online shopping, raised interest rates and inflation. We are disappointed to lose any businesses but this can happen in a free market economy.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on what support the Council was providing to businesses in the District, the Portfolio Holder highlighted schemes such as Shop Doctor, start-up support and opportunities to bid for funding.

Question 3

From Cllr M Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary

Whilst most members of the Armed Forces community are healthy, happy and gainfully employed, the unique nature of military life brings with it many challenges that need to be recognised and better understood and for some, particularly the injured and bereaved, for whom extra support needs to be provided.

It was to support veterans and military families the Military Covenant was enshrined in law in the 2011 Armed Forces Act and ensures that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged as a result of their service when accessing Government and commercial services.

Although some actions do take place in the New Forest District to support military families currently the New Forest District Council does not meet the full breadth of requirements outlined in the Military Covenant and its guidance for local authorities.

Therefore, can you confirm that this Council will put in place such actions as are necessary to meet the full criteria under the act.

Answer:

Thank you for your question, which is timely, as a review of the Council's Armed Forces Community Covenant is already well underway, with the Council's Executive Management Team due to consider a report later this month.

This Council has a strong track record working with the Armed Forces community, having entered into an Armed Forces Community Covenant with HQ Solent Station in May 2013. The Community Covenant is an additional, voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community. It supplements the statutory Armed Forces Covenant which outlines the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces at a local level.

The Council has due regard to the principles of the Statutory Armed Forces Covenant when exercising the relevant functions, and a significant range of activity takes place across the Council.

- The Council is a 'Forces Friendly' Employer. We have an HR policy for Reservists, helping them meet their training requirements. We advertise employment opportunities on the Ministry of Defence's Career Transition website and I am pleased to report that we have just had our first successful recruitment through this website, for a gas engineer.*
- In Communities, we work closely with the 17 Port and Maritime Regiment's Community Development Worker, who is part of the Army Welfare Service. Working*

with HQ Solent Station we have recently delivered the artificial turf pitch at Applemore College, with the council contributing £50,000 toward the costs.

- In Housing and Homelessness, we work with those who are leaving the Armed Forces throughout their homelessness pathway, as well as ensuring appropriate signposting to relevant support agencies. AND most importantly in terms of our statutory duty, our Allocations Policy ensures our duty of care is met through disregarding compensation received for injury or disability; exemption from the local connection requirement and automatic placement into band 3.*
- We have a long standing civic commitment to the Armed Forces in the District, having awarded Freedom of the District to 17 Port and Maritime Regiment RLC in 2016. Our civic commitments also include the marking of Armed Forces day and Armistice and Remembrance Sunday Commemorations, with the work of our Armed Forces Member Champion, who supports the Chairman at these events.*

Finally, I am delighted to inform Members that the Council has recently been nominated, by a newly employed veteran, for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. This scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same.

The review underway will reflect on this wide range of activity, of which I have given just a small snapshot, bringing it together in one place. I hope this will shine a light on all this Council already does, whilst looking to other opportunities to enhance, and I will bring forward an update to Cabinet in due course.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on additional activity to support veterans, the Leader agreed that these initiatives would be pursued as soon as possible.

Question 4

From Cllr Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron

Is the Council content with its due diligence process before awarding large contracts to external companies?

Answer:

The Council has a documented, robust process in awarding contracts and I am comfortable with that process. I can assure you that we do follow it and that contracts are awarded in accordance with it.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the Freedom Leisure's net contribution to the Council, the Portfolio Holder suggested that this figure could have been obtained had the question been put in advance.

Question 5

From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole

Why did Conservative Councillors, when agreeing the contract for the leisure service, give Freedom Leisure the power to evict local swimming clubs from the Leisure Centres after 12 months?

Answer:

In agreeing to entering into the Contract with Freedom Leisure, Members of this Council were aware of the need for Freedom to be able to make operational decisions for the running of our 5 leisure centres. Safeguards were built in to ensure that clubs' bookings were maintained for a period of 12 months. This contract addition was welcomed by the clubs who were fully consulted during the transition to Freedom Leisure, and so had full awareness of this position at the time of contract commencement.

As all Members will know, Freedom have paused any decisions on changes to the Swim Club bookings until further dialogue and consultation has taken place. Senior officers and I are liaising with Freedom over this issue and will look to reach consensus as far as possible.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on prior awareness of any decision to change access to swimming facilities, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that this was not the case and the contract made provision for 12 months of protection as noted in the answer to the first question.

Question 6

From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole

This Council has a responsibility to undertake Equality Impact Assessments on all its decisions. Why was this not considered when Freedom Leisure, our Partners, made the unpopular and upsetting decision to tell local Swimming Clubs they could no longer use their pools and stop access for many children with special and specific needs to learn this essential life skill in a appropriate environment? And why didn't you as the Portfolio Holder challenge this decision when you were made aware of it and engage with Freedom if access to Swimming for all ages and abilities really matters?

Answer:

Freedom Leisure teach over 63,000 children per week how to swim. They have over 4,700 children learning to swim at the 5 New Forest Leisure Centres. They exclusively deliver learn-to-swim programmes to children with a variety of needs at the significant majority of the sites they operate; they know what they are doing when it comes to teaching children, and adults, how to swim.

I do accept that their initial decision to give notice to the swimming clubs who are operating learn-to-swim should have been better consulted on, so I am pleased that they have paused any decisions on changes to the Swim Club bookings.

I would like to remind the councillor that one of the key drivers in the change of operational model was to not only protect the provision of the Council's 5 leisure centres across the District, but to enhance them. I believe we are incredibly lucky to have a partner who has delivered nearly £3m in capital investment at our centres, meaning they are a more diverse community facility than ever before.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on acknowledging the concerns about swimming provision at a recent Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that these questions were not asked of the Portfolio Holder, or the Freedom Leisure Area Manager, at this meeting.

Question 7

From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole

The contract for Freedom Leisure was described by the then chair of the Task and Finish Group as 'robust ...in view of detail' and voted for by every Conservative member then present, some of whom are still here. What can be done to make sure the awful behaviour towards our swimming and other community clubs cannot continue or be replicated in the future?

Answer:

As I have already commented, the clubs were engaged in the consultation process when the Council was considering its options in order to protect the provision of its 5 Leisure Centres. The clubs, as with the cross-party Task and Finish Group, were fully aware of the 12 month booking protection offered within the contract. That 12 month protection expired in June 2022.

I'll say it for the third time now, I am pleased that they have paused any decisions on changes to the Swim Club bookings, and I look forward to working with Freedom to ensure the needs of all swimming club members are catered for under any new alternative proposal.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on other groups and clubs impacted by service change proposals, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he was not aware of any such clubs. He concluded by highlighting that in partnering with Freedom, the Council had been able to protect the provision of leisure facilities, rather than face their closure, as in other areas of the country.

Second Questions

Question 8

From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp

Can the portfolio holder please outline how NFDC responded to the recent suggested Permitted Development legislation which would allow shops, offices and outbuildings to be turned into housing with no structured plan or infrastructure?

Answer:

I think Cllr Rackham is referring to some changes that came in over two years ago in August 2021. There was a more recent consultation this year that specifically proposed extending the same existing permitted development change of use rights to land in National Parks. As it is the New Forest National Park Authority who are the planning authority for the National Park, and I would suggest that Cllr Rackham's query as to how they responded as an affected planning authority is best directed to them.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on supporting Town and Parish Councils with any lost CIL or S106 funds, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that the Council could not commit to this without understanding the detail of any final proposals to changing legislation.

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