

**PORTFOLIOS – ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY / LEADER / FINANCE AND CORPORATE**

**RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 28 MARCH 2024**

**DISCUSSION OF MOTION SUBMITTED TO COUNCIL – HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PLANS TO CLOSE MARCHWOOD AND SOMERLEY RECYCLING CENTRES / LOCAL AUTHORITY FINANCES**

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 That the panel discuss the motion presented to the Council on 26 February, and specifically;
- a) provide feedback to the Council's Statutory Responsible Financial Officer on the content of the draft proposed corporate response; and
  - b) make recommendations to the Leader of the Council in relation to the request to write to Government on local authority finances.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 In accordance with Standing Order 21, Cllr J Davies moved the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Rackham:-

*"This Council is concerned by Hampshire County Council's plans to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres.*

*This Council believes these plans will increase fly-tipping in the New Forest and mean more money is spent by New Forest District Council on removing fly-tipped waste.*

*This Council calls for a corporate response to the consultation to be prepared expressing this council's opposition to the closure of any New Forest Recycling Centre.*

*This Council further calls on the Leader of the Council to write to the Government highlighting the dire financial situation of local authorities and urging the Government to make more funding available so local authorities do not have to cut vital public services."*

- 2.2 Under the provisions of Standing Order 42, the above motion, after being proposed and seconded (without speeches), should stand referred to the body within whose terms of reference the subject matter of the motions comes, or the Cabinet or such Committees or Panels that the Council may determine.
- 2.3 It was agreed that the motion be referred to the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel for consideration.
- 2.4 The motion has been broken down into 2 constituent parts for the purpose of this report and its consideration thereof.

### **3. PART 1 – HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FUTURE SERVICES CONSULTATION**

- 3.1 It was confirmed at the January Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel that the Council's Section 151 Officer would be compiling a corporate response to the Hampshire Future Services consultation.
- 3.2 The response has been initiated by senior officers, and relevant Portfolio Holders have been consulted with. The full proposed response is appended to this report. In specific regard to the motion, the Household Waste Recycling Centre measure and proposed response is included at no. 8.
- 3.3 The Council's Section 151 Officer will submit the final corporate response in line with the consultation close date of 31 March 2024.

### **4. PART 2 – LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT**

- 4.1 At its meeting on the 26 February 2024, the Council set a balanced budget for 2024/25. The budget was supported with a 4% funding guarantee grant from the government, worth £1.2 million.
- 4.2 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan sets out a forecast budget deficit of £2.708 million to 2027/28 (equivalent to 11% of the Council's General Fund Budget). The financial strategy to 2027/28 seeks to identify efficiencies through the investment in the Transformation Programme, as well as increasing income through fees and charges reviews, and new income generating opportunities through adopted strategies.
- 4.3 The main area of frustration from the Council's Section 151 Officer's perspective is that government settlement funding has been provided of late through 1-year settlements, preventing effective long-term planning. It has been several years since a multi-year settlement has been provided. The Council has supported LGA and District Council's Network lobbying on this matter.
- 4.4 It is also notable that the forecast deficit of Hampshire County Council as the upper tier authority, with numerous demand led services, is significant on a cash basis at £132 million by April 2025.
- 4.5 It is also worthy of a note that a new government will be formed between now and the 28 January 2025, which means a 1-year settlement for 2025/26 is likely, and of course the result may change the local government financial landscape further still.
- 4.6 If the Leader were minded, pending recommendations from the panel, to send a letter to the government, it would be appropriate to refer to the importance of the funding guarantee grant, and confirm how essential this was in achieving a sound balanced budget and it's need to continue going forward. It would also be sensible to reference that the Council is concerned at the scale of the financial challenge faced by the upper tier authority (Hampshire County Council) and the implications that this may have to this Council's own financial position, and ultimately the potential detriment to local residents using and relying on vital local government services that could be significantly reduced, or stopped altogether if local authorities have to adopt a 'statutory service only' model in the near future.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Although this report contains information pertaining to Council finances, there are none directly associated with the content or recommendations.

## **6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 No crime and disorder implications have been identified.

## **7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The draft corporate budget consultation response sets out concerns of an environmental nature with regards to the potential closing of the Household Waste Recycling Centres.

## **8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 No equality and diversity implications have been identified.

## **9. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 No data or privacy implications have been identified.

### **For further information contact:**

Alan Bethune FCCA  
Strategic Director Corporate Resources &  
Transformation and Section 151 Officer  
**02380 28 5001**  
[alan.bethune@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:alan.bethune@nfdc.gov.uk)

### **Background Papers:**

**DRAFT Proposed NFDC Response**

**In response to the County Council’s Future Services Consultation, New Forest District Council provides the following representations:**

- .....
1. **Adult social care charges:** Proposals to change the way contributions towards non-residential social care costs are calculated, so that the amount someone pays towards their non-residential care and support increases from 95% to 100% of any assessable income remaining once standard outgoings are paid for and an allowance is made for general living costs such as food, utility bills and clothing.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council has concerns on the proposed action.*

*NFDC is acutely aware of the impact of cost-of-living pressures on the most vulnerable people in our communities. Assuming that many of those who would be affected by the proposed increase are considered as low-income households and/or have disabilities, are aged over 65, or have other socio-economic pressures the proposed increase of personal contributions arrives at a difficult time with national economic factors placing financial pressures on households.*

*The EIA published in September 2023 highlights poverty as a neutral issue for this aspect and does not demonstrate how this proposal may impact on affordability and remaining disposable income of affected households, in an environment where other household bills and charges are also on the increase.*

*NFDC supports a phased approach to increasing charges for affected households, and for the County Council to provide offers of practical support to households to secure competitively priced care.*

- .....
2. **Adult social care grant schemes:** To withdraw funding for three Adult Social Care grant programmes that assist voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations in Hampshire, namely the Council for Voluntary Services Infrastructure Grant, the Citizens Advice Infrastructure Grant and the Local Solutions Grant.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council has concerns on the proposed action.*

*Any reduction in funding to Citizens Advice will have a detrimental impact as Hampshire Citizens Advice apply for grant funding on behalf of local Citizens Advice which enables them to support our residents and communities, especially those who are vulnerable.*

*It is also likely that any reduced funding to the other Adult Social Care Grant programmes will result in an increased demand directly back to the Local Authority.*

- .....
- 3. Competitive (one-off) grant schemes:** To withdraw three competitive grant schemes which provide one-off grants to a range of community groups and organisations; namely the Leader's Community Grants, the Rural Communities Fund (including country shows) and the Parish and Town Council Investment Fund.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council has concerns on the proposed action.*

*The grant schemes collectively are invaluable to the success and going concern status of so many voluntary sector organisations across the district and for raising awareness of rural Hampshire and its history. Removing support here will limit the reach of so many organisations and inevitably if community organisations fail and cease to operate, the public sector is left to pick up the gaps. Perhaps the County Council could look again at reducing the cap and overall fund, as opposed to ceasing altogether.*

*The Rural communities fund is a relatively small fund, but with scheme priorities that are very relevant.*

*The Parish and Town Investment fund provides valuable funding support for projects, skills development and supports the County's own declaration of a Climate Emergency through the provision of funding for increased energy efficiency. The District Council would advocate at least the Energy Efficiency element of the fund staying open.*

- .....
- 4. Hampshire Cultural Trust grant:** To reduce the amount of grant given to Hampshire Cultural Trust to manage and deliver arts and museums services.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council has concerns on the proposed action.*

*A reduction in funding of the Cultural Trust without the certainty of how the shortfall can be recouped is of concern to NFDC. This proposed reduction is likely to have a*

*significant impact on volunteers and boards who will require additional resources, skills and expertise to operate more commercially and sustain viability. A likely knock-on-effect is increased pricing for members of the public to access cultural activities, which may result in decreases in visitor numbers, further affecting the income of those centres and activities supported by the Trust.*

*Whilst the Forest Arts Centre, our New Milton based HCT arts centre, is not on the list of centres at risk, this reduction threatens the organisation's future stability, ensuring the continuation of important cultural work in New Milton. Forest Arts Centre has a thriving community programme and is a key part of daily life for many New Milton residents.*

*Rockbourne Villa is also an extremely important and unique heritage site and is the only other site supported in the New Forest district.*

*NFDC seeks assurance from the County Council that it is committed to financially supporting arts and culture to flourish Hampshire wide, maintaining the network of connected cultural societies, organisations, and offerings across the County, which benefit the County's residents. Should the proposal be approved NFDC seeks assurances that the Trust will be supported with the expertise required to manage the shortfall, with minimal impact across the sector.*

- .....
- 5. **Highways maintenance:** To reduce planned highways maintenance activities, incorporating larger-scale structural repairs, surface treatments on roads, and drainage improvements.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council does not have a view on the proposed action.*

*This is a County Council function/responsibility. NFDC expectations are that the county will maintain highways to their safe adopted standard.*

*Opportunities to review the maintenance of highway verges should be considered positively and proactively in partnership with district councils (who are contracted to do the work), and opportunities to enable habitat and land for pollinators given due consideration to support a declared Climate and Nature Emergency response.*

- .....
- 6. **Highways winter service:** To comprehensively review and revise the criteria used to determine which roads should be treated as part of the Priority One network to better align with current national guidance and reflect changes in travelling and commuting patterns, and to update the routes accordingly.

**NFDC Response:**

*NFDC does not have a position on this proposal in principle at this stage, but would expect to be consulted as part of any specific proposal being considered.*

.....

7. **Homelessness Support Services:** To stop funding services that the County Council does not have a legal requirement to provide, that support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council does not have a view on the proposed action.*

*This proposal will have limited impact on the New Forest district as HCC funding has been consistently reduced for several years, with a small grant contribution replacing a single support worker in the last 2 years. The Council's Homelessness Service has already adjusted to this reduction in provision with significant resource investment into securing grant funding to embed a new team to support housing and health outcomes, alongside the activities of the Cost-of-Living Steering Group and action plan, plus other welfare support work, and was already prepared for the cessation in funding. Whilst it should be made known that grant funding for the support team ends in March 2025 there is no direct impact expected from this proposal.*

.....

8. **Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs):** To provide a sustainable, cost-effective and fit for purpose Household Waste Recycling service within a reduced budget. This might involve introducing charging for discretionary services, implementing alternative delivery models, reducing opening days and/or hours or reducing the number of HWRCs.

**NFDC Response:**

*NFDC's view on the five proposed changes for HWRCs are as follows:*

1. *Introducing charging for discretionary services*

*The council supports this proposed action and agrees it should be explored further. Through consultation, the County Council should be mindful of the potential impact to residents on low incomes and residents less able to pay to dispose of waste.*

2. *Alternative delivery models*

*NFDC does not feel this a service suitable for alternative service delivery. Whilst some elements of disposal such as reuse and resale can be appropriately supported by the VCS, the management of waste disposal is not suitable due to scale, risk, and regulation. NFDC has its own budget pressures, and as a collection authority plays its role in investing improvements to the waste system. We cannot pick up this*

statutory responsibility of the disposal authority. This would not lower the cost to the Hampshire council taxpayer, and there are no economies of scale such as those available in managing the sites as part of the wider network which already exists.

### 3. Changes to types of waste accepted at HWRCs

This proposal would seem to have the effect of requiring service users to travel further to dispose of some material streams. This is not supported by NFDC. This would have negative effects along the same lines as those described further down in relation to site closures.

### 4. Reducing the opening days and/or hours of HWRCs

NFDC supports this proposal only as an alternative to closing HWRCs. This is because it retains the local facility, just on a slightly reduced basis. Closing sites 1 day per week and reducing the opening hours by 2 hours per day Mon-Fri is a relatively small reduction in overall capacity that would deliver a significant contribution (c£750k) to the £1.2m target, whilst retaining full provision over the weekend, the busiest time of the week. NFDC feels this approach would significantly reduce the risks described below with regard to closure of sites. (NOTE – this combination of closing sites on some days AND reducing opening hours on others was not listed as an option in the relevant consultation question – we believe this is an oversight and should be explored).

### 5. Reducing the number of existing sites

NFDC does not support the option of closing two HWRCs within the NFDC area. This is because of the impact on our residents, the local environment, and the council itself. The reasons behind this are related to the following, explained further in turn below:

- Mileages/travel
- Flytipping
- Bring sites
- Kerbside collections

With regard to the closure of Somerley, the documentation points to the distances from Somerley to the next nearest HWRC as 19 miles. However, it should be noted that some residents already have to travel some distance to even get to Somerley. A resident of Fordingbridge, a town of over 6,000 people, already has a round-trip of journey of 16 miles to Somerley – this would increase to 36 miles to/from the next nearest site in Southampton. Users of Marchwood HWRC would see a lower % increase in mileage if the site were to close, but the journey would involve using congested routes into Southampton, to use a HWRC that is not under the control of HCC and which is therefore subject to the policies of a non-Hampshire authority. If access to this site for Hampshire residents were to cease, then the impact on mileages is even more significant.

The additional mileage will lead to longer journeys on roads across the open forest, increasing congestion and increasing local emissions, as well as endangering



*livestock on un-fenced roads. It will also disproportionately affect low-income families who would have to spend a greater amount of money on fuel.*

*Some residents of the New Forest (e.g. those in the north-west) would face a 1hr 20m round trip to their nearest HWRC. We do not feel this length of round trip meets the threshold of meeting your statutory duty under EPA 1990 section 51 which requires HWRC facilities to be 'reasonably accessible to persons resident in the area'. It is certainly outside of the 7 miles/30 minutes recommendations made by WRAP and referred to in the consultation paperwork.*

*NFDC believes that this would lead to some individuals attempting to dispose of their waste via other means in order to avoid this journey.*

*Firstly, NFDC believes an increase in flytipping would occur. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which included a period of HWRCs being closed, NFDC saw a dramatic and significant rise in all types of fly tipping. In the year April 2020 -March 2021 we collected 3,600 flytips, against a 5-year average of under 900. This number has never returned to pre-pandemic levels and is currently 2,500 incidents per year.*

*Increased flytipping would have a detrimental impact on key landowners including Forestry England, and livestock. The New Forest National Park and AONB within the New Forest already experiences fly-tipping that is detrimental to environmental standards, and HCC has a duty to further the aims of the National Park. We are concerned that the loss of HWRCs will lead to increasing degradation of the unique landscape and biodiversity present in the New Forest.*

*It would lead to increased cost of collection of flytips for NFDC, and ultimately the disposal cost would still fall to HCC. There could be particular issues with flytipping of materials that HWRCs currently cater for that are more difficult to dispose of via regular kerbside collections. This could include WEEE, paint, gas bottles, or waste contaminated by Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) etc. The need to separate these kinds of waste to comply with regulations would have a disproportionate impact on WCAs.*

*We'd expect two impacts of closures upon NFDC's bring site network:*

- 1) The bring sites would attract flytipping of waste not suitable for bring site disposal, as the sites may be seen as substitute HWRCs. This would increase collection and enforcement costs for NFDC. During the covid-19 HWRC shutdown, NFDC recorded a huge increase in flytips at bring sites. In April 2019 we recorded 67 flytips across the district - flytips at bring sites were not of any recordable level. In April 2020, when HWRCs closed, NFDC collected 487 flytips, with 279 of these at the bring sites across the New Forest.*
- 2) Increased use of bring sites for legitimate material – in particular this would relate to cardboard. Our bring site containers are currently 1100l bins that cannot cope with large quantities of cardboard. To cope with the increased usage that would occur, these sites will require more frequent emptying schedules, more containers on site, or larger containers – this would lead to lost revenue in council car parks and require greater level of resource to collect.*

*NFDC is about to invest a significant amount of money (c£10m in capital funding over the next 3 years alone) in a new kerbside collection system aimed at minimising waste and increasing recycling. Closure of HWRCs would push material into kerbside collections. This would include residents depositing more items, including garden waste, small WEEE, paint or other items, into their black bins. This not only misses the opportunity to divert these materials to recycling, it also increases the hazards around waste collection by diverting a wider range of unknown items into black bins.*

*Finally, closure of HWRCs does not mean that the waste was formerly taken there disappears. The cost of disposal of this material is still likely to fall to HCC indirectly, and probably not via the most cost-effective (£ per tonne) route that is available through the economies of scale of a HWRC network. Whilst closure may save on operating costs, much of this operating cost is passed to the WCA, who will collect the material via flytipping, bring sites or kerbside collections.*

*The Council Leader also wishes to include the following general representation on this matter:*

*“As the Leader of NFDC I am extremely worried about the proposed closing of the Waste Sites. This could have a huge impact on the Forest. We are custodians of this beautiful area, we are responsible for maintaining a healthy living environment, keeping all animals who inhabit the forest safe. We already suffer from fly tipping in certain areas, please re-think this policy change and do not close these sites. You will put a huge financial burden on District Councils who will have the costs associated with clearing up illegally dumped rubbish. Please look at the opening times or perhaps closing one day a week for some of the savings you need to find. Our residents are also your residents please listen to them.”*

.....

9. **Library stock:** To reduce how much is spent on new library stock, such as books and digital resources, each year.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council does not have a view on the proposed action.*

*It is for the County Council to manage stock and resources at these important community facilities.*

.....

10. **Passenger transport:** To reduce the amount of money spent on passenger transport by withdrawing all remaining funding that the County Council is not legally required to provide. This includes funding for community transport services (incorporating Dial-a-Ride, Call and Go, Taxi Shares, Group Hire Services, and Wheels to Work), subsidies for bus routes that are not commercially viable, additional funding to extend the Concessionary Travel

Scheme (older and disabled persons bus passes) and a review of the potential impact of reductions on the school transport service and social care budgets.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council has concerns on the proposed action.*

*NFDC would expect to be consulted as part of any specific proposal being considered. NFDC makes the observation at this stage that the remote nature of much of our district, including for access to work, as well as the age demographics of our resident population will necessarily need to inform plans and should be a fundamental consideration. Further, it is unclear how these changes support the delivery of the vision and key outcomes set out in the County Council's recently adopted Local Transport Plan 4; particularly an inclusive transport system that supports health, wellbeing and quality of life for all.*

*The District Council currently support the community transport grants through SLAs with the County and would be unable to increase financial support to these schemes if the County were to withdraw their funding.*

*Any changes to services need to be promptly updated into various policy frameworks that support the local plan making, and planning decision taking context with regards to the modal hierarchy.*

.....

**11. Rural countryside parking:** To introduce car parking charges at rural countryside car parks (such as nature reserves and conservation sites) that the County Council manages, where it is expected that doing so would be commercially viable.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council does not have a view on the proposed action, although we would want to further understand the positions reached by the NF National Park Authority and Forestry England on this matter through relevant consultation on any specific proposal being considered.*

*New Forest District Council charges on all of its car parks where this is commercially viable and considers that there are sound economic and climate sustainability reasons for introducing charges.*

*The potential knock-on implications in terms of displacement of car parking would necessarily need careful consideration and potential measures to restrict and enforce, particularly in the context of any impact on the National Park environment and other environmentally sensitive sites that could be vulnerable to additional disturbance, including those in parts of the New Forest coastal areas.*

.....

12. **School Crossing Patrols:** To review the School Crossing Patrols (SCP) service by looking at each SCP site to decide if alternative safety measures exist or could be put in place that would enable the SCP to be safely withdrawn or be funded by other organisations.

**NFDC Response:**

*The District Council does not have a view on the proposed action.*

*NFDC would expect to be consulted as part of any specific proposal being considered with particular consideration given to both current and future (from planned development) implications.*

.....

13. **Street lighting:** To reduce the brightness of streetlights further and to extend the periods that streetlights are switched off during the night (by 2 hours) – where it is considered safe and appropriate to do so.

**NFDC Response:**

*Whilst NFDC supports the overall proposal it does have some concerns and comments on the approach. NFDC recognises the cost saving impact of the approach, but messaging in support of the climate and sustainability benefits delivered by reduced energy usage has not been put forward by the County Council. NFDC supports a reduction in carbon emissions due to reduced energy usage as part of its Climate and Nature emergency declared in 2022, as well as the potential positive nature impacts on habitats and foraging benefits due to darker skies.*

*NFDC believes the proposal provides an opportunity to consult with parish and districts to align streetlighting strategies to support wider environmental benefits and community safety impacts. The County Council’s proposals do not go far enough in committing to a partnership approach to implementing a combined approach.*

*The proposal to increase the dimming and switch off lights at midnight in residential areas is likely to contribute to an increased fear of crime, as highlighted by the consultation response, and an increase in crime within residential communities, particularly in rural locations. There is also a likelihood of a secondary impact on the night-time economy as residents return home before street lighting dimming and shut off times.*

*NFDC recommends further consultation and mapping with local Community Safety partnerships and Economic Development Teams to align further exemption criteria with local circumstances.*

*It is also recognised the proposal has identified Christmas Eve, Christmas Day & New Years Eve as periods of exemption. Greater understanding on the proposal of this generalised approach is required as no supportive information has been provided as part of the consultation in how this reflects local needs.*