

**8 APRIL 2024**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 8 April 2024.

- \* 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
- \* Stephanie Osborne
- \* Alan O'Sullivan
- \* 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, Tanya Coulter, James Carpenter, Richard Knott, Joe Tyler and Matt Wisdom.

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Davies, England, Glass, Reid, Thierry and Young.

**72 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024, be confirmed.

Note – A Member highlighted that they were yet to receive information in response to a supplementary question asked at the last Council meeting. The Chief Executive confirmed this would be followed up and actioned.

### **73 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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

### **74 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **Former Cllr Bill Dow**

The Chairman reported with great sadness on the recent passing of former Cllr Bill Dow.

Bill was first elected to the Council in May 1999 to the Forest North West Ward, serving until May 2019. During his 20 years' service, Bill was a member of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel, the Planning Committee and the General Purposes & Licensing Committee, which he chaired for 5 years from 2002 to 2006, when he became Vice Chairman of the Council.

Bill went on to serve as the Council's Chairman from 2007 to 2008.

Bill also served on many Outside Bodies during his time on the Council. These included the South East Employers' Organisation, the Salisbury District Community Health Council and the Bournemouth International Airport Consultative Committee.

The Chairman represented the Council at Bill's funeral, held on Friday 22 March at the Church of the Holy Ascension in Hyde.

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman expressed sincere condolences to Bill's family and friends and placed on record thanks for the service he had given to this District.

#### **D Day – 80th Anniversary**

The Chairman referred to the 80th anniversary of D-Day on 6 June 2024, the largest naval, air and land operation in history.

To mark this occasion and to remember the heroism of those who landed on the shores of the Normandy beaches, the D-Day Flag of Peace would be raised at a ceremony at Appletree Court, in the presence of the new Chairman of the Council, along with the Armed Forces Champion and the Leader of the Council.

It was hoped that those employees who served would attend the ceremony, alongside representatives from HQ Solent Station at Marchwood – duties permitting.

#### **Civic Day**

The Chairman reported on his Civic Day, held on 13 March. Guests attended Minstead Trust, one of the Chairman's charities for the year, and Furzey Gardens. Minstead Trust offered a detailed walk around the facilities looking at the work that

they do to support people with learning disabilities and guests also enjoyed a very informative guided walk around Furzey Gardens.

### **50 Years of NFDC**

The Chairman expressed his honour to sit as Chairman as the Council celebrated 50 years since it was formed in 1974.

He highlighted that all the Chairmen throughout the past 50 years had also been very important to the voluntary and charitable organisations across the District. The office of Chairman had attended events to raise the profile of these vital services, raised funds to support their ongoing work in local communities and celebrated their achievements with them and the people they support.

The Chairman considered that it was only right to pause to look back and celebrate what has been achieved, but perhaps more importantly look forward to what the Council planned to deliver, continuing to provide for local communities.

### **Engagements**

The Chairman reported on the following recent engagements:-

#### 24 March

The Town Mayor of New Milton held his civic service at St Magdalene Church on 24 March, which included a collection for Ashley Family Hub, as the Mayor's chosen charity.

#### 27 March

The Chairman attended the presentation of a research document "Engage, Listen, Act" – co-produced by Winchester University and New Forest Mencap, on how to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities in the New Forest and surrounding areas.

#### 3 April

The Chairman attended a Special Meeting of New Milton Town Council, where the Honorary Freedom of the Town was awarded to former town councillor, mayor and District Councillor Goff Beck.

## **75 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Leader made the following announcements:-

### **Economic Development Governance Structures**

The Leader updated the Council on the newly created governance structures for economic development. Hampshire County Council had taken on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions for the whole of the Hampshire geography from 1 April 2024. The Leader represented the Council on a newly established joint leaders place board that fed in to the Hampshire Growth and Skills Board. Given that the New Forest was the fourth largest economy in Hampshire and generated some £4.4 billion per annum to the wider economy, and with opportunities such as

the Solent Freeport, it was an important priority for the Leader to continue to represent local priorities that will support a prosperous New Forest.

### **Community Hub – Testwood**

The Leader reported on an initiative to support local communities. Along with the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, and the Chief Executive, she had the privilege of visiting the Community Hub at Testwood Baptist Church. Attendees could see the real difference the volunteers make, not only in the food bank but also in youth initiatives, and sessions reaching out for those managing very challenging circumstances. The Leader recognised there was a real strain on many residents, and she was pleased that the Council's work with the cost of living steering group, the community grants programme and the councillor grants allocated by all councillors, do also go some way to support this important grass roots work.

## **76 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW**

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 22 March 2024. Cllr Hartmann seconded the motion.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the revisions to the Council's Financial Regulations be adopted with effect from 8 April 2024.

## **77 RESPONSE TO MOTION - HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PLANS TO CLOSE MARCHWOOD AND SOMERLEY RECYCLING CENTRES / LOCAL AUTHORITY FINANCES**

Cllr O'Sullivan introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 28 March 2024. Cllr Dunning seconded the motion.

A number of members spoke in support of the Council's robust response to the proposals to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres, noting the potential impact on the District and its residents.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Council note the Panel's views on the proposed corporate response to the Hampshire County Council (HCC) Future Services Consultation set out by the Council's Section 151 Officer, including the specific response which objects to the plans to close Marchwood and Somerley Recycling Centres, as submitted to HCC on 28 March 2024 (Appendix 1 of the report); and
- (b) That the Council note that the Panel endorsed, without amendment, the proposed content of the letter to the Government on local authority finances, to be sent by the Leader of the Council, detailed throughout section 4 of the report.

## 78 REPORT OF CABINET - 3 APRIL 2024

## PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 April 2024.

## PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

## Item 5 – Updated Corporate Plan 2024-2028

Cllr Cleary introduced the item and moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting. In doing so, she highlighted the recent endorsement from the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel, expressing her view that all the work undertaken had culminated in the best corporate plan the Council had ever produced. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr Richards moved the following amendment and in doing so, highlighted the importance of setting an ambitious plan in respect of the Council's overall activity and commitment to the Climate and Nature Emergency. Cllr Parker seconded the amendment:-

“That Council approve the Corporate Plan 2024-2028 (Appendix 1), updated following public consultation, **subject to:**

***the emissions from the Council's vehicle fleet measure within Place Priority 2 being supplemented with a measure of total emissions related to all aspects of the Council's activity, including its supply chain.***”

Members speaking for the amendment referred to the Council's Climate and Nature Emergency declaration, and the opportunity to ensure regular, transparent accounting for the Council's activity in this regard. It was suggested that the collection of this sort of data was not uncommon in the corporate world.

Members speaking against the amendment sought further information in relation to the resources required to measure all emissions related to Council activity and its supply chain, in addition to the Council's vehicle fleet.

Some Members referenced the upcoming performance management framework which would set specific, measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and in doing so could revisit the proposal in any case.

In responding to the debate on the amendment, Cllr Richards encouraged the Council to ensure accountability across Council activity, expressing concern that if not included within the plan, it would not hold the importance it needed to drive ownership of responding to the climate and nature emergency.

In responding to the debate on the amendment, the Leader expressed her concern at agreeing to a performance indicator that the Council could not accurately measure. She highlighted that whilst the emissions from the Council's vehicle fleet was measurable, the wider supply chain of Council partners extended outside of the Council's control.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

The Council went on to debate the substantive motion.

Some Members made comments in relation to the Solent Freeport and its prominence within the “prosperity” theme of the Corporate Plan. There were also comments made in relation to how the perception of crime could be quantified and alternative options to measure performance in this area.

The Leader responded to the debate and welcomed regular performance reporting that was accessible to the public.

Put to the vote, the substantive motion was carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council approve the Corporate Plan 2024-2028 (Appendix 1), updated following public consultation.

**79 QUESTIONS**

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

- From Cllr Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on damage to Rumbidge Street car park.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on Southern Water.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr S Davies, on the use of Solent Mead Care Home site for affordable housing.
- From Cllr M Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on child poverty.
- From Cllr Cullen to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on Solent Freeport.
- From Cllr Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Dibden Bay.
- From Cllr M Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Fawley Waterside.
- From Cllr Murray to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on the new Community Forum.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole, on PCSOs and ACSOs.
- From Cllr M Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on Solent Freeport.

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

**80 NOMINATIONS TO THE OFFICES OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman invited Members to propose and second the nominations for the offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council received in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Cllr Penman moved that Cllr Hawkins be the Council's nomination for the office of Chairman of the Council for 2024/25. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

Cllr M Wade moved that Cllr Harrison be the Council's nomination for the office of Chairman of the Council for 2024/25. Cllr Woods seconded the motion.

Members debated the nominations.

Put to a secret ballot, Cllr Hawkins received the majority of votes.

Cllr Penman moved that Cllr Sleep be the Council's nomination for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2024/25. Cllr O'Sullivan seconded the motion.

Cllr M Clark moved that Cllr J Davies be the Council's nomination for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2024/25. Cllr Osborne seconded the motion.

Members debated the nominations.

Put to a secret ballot, Cllr Sleep received the majority of votes.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council's Nominations for the Offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2024/25, be as follows:-

Chairman – Cllr Hawkins

Vice-Chairman – Cllr Sleep

**81 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

**RESOLVED:**

That the following membership changes be noted:-

Planning Committee

Cllr Glass to replace Cllr Penny

Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Woods to replace Cllr Millar

CHAIRMAN

This page is intentionally left blank



## FULL COUNCIL – 8 APRIL 2024 – QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22

### First Questions

#### Question 1

**From Cllr David Harrison to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoff Blunden**

What is the estimated cost of repairing all of the damage to the Rumbridge Street car park in Totton, by permitting the heavy tanker lorries, contracted by Southern Water, to drive onto the car park?

*Answer:*

*Southern Water approached the Council at short notice because of an emergency, to request access to sewers within Rumbridge Street car park. This was to help them mitigate the impact of a burst sewer in the local area. The Council was very happy to co-operate with Southern Water and their contractor restoring local services was clearly in our residents' interest.*

*As on previous occasions, it was agreed with Southern Water that any damage resulting from their short-term operation from the car park would be repaired at Southern Water's cost. As such, NFDC is not aware of the costs of repair, but does note that the resurfacing and repair works are currently underway.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question which highlighted the responsibility to apologise to residents, the Portfolio Holder reiterated his understanding of the challenges faced by Southern Water and that the Council does what it can to support them in such emergency situations.*

#### Question 2

**From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

Would the Leader join me in a letter to our two local MPs asking them to look into why Southern Water claims they are legally allowed to dump sewage into rivers up to 10 times a year and what can be done to change this?

*Answer:*

*The Government produced a Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan in September 2023 to tackle the impacts of storm overflows. This plan details the targets for water companies to meet regarding the number of releases and where it is permitted up to 2050. I am pleased that new duties in the Environment Act 2021 will now give the Regulator tools to hold water companies to account and take enforcement action where they are not meeting their legal obligations.*

*Members and Officers from the Council attended a Southern Water Drop in Event in Totton on 21 March, where our concerns were raised relating to water supplies and foul water infrastructure in the district. Discussions also took place around measures being introduced to reduce the use of storm overflows and Southern Water's future investment plans.*

*This Council will continue to hold Southern Water to account and only last Friday I wrote, with the full backing of our Chief Executive, Kate Ryan, to request Southern Water attend a*

*member session later this year, with the aim that members from all parties can put resident concerns to their representatives regarding both sewerage discharge, and water supply issues. I will keep Members informed once this meeting has been scheduled.*

### **Question 3**

**From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Steve Davies**

Will the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness meet with Hampshire County Council to discuss the possibility of using the Solent Mead Care Home site in Lymington to build much-needed affordable housing?

*Answer:*

*In July last year we were made aware of the County Council's possible plans to close the Solent Mead Care Home in Lymington, subject to consultation. In August our Chief Executive wrote to Hampshire County Council's Chief Executive Carolyn Williamson setting out this Council's interest in acquiring both Solent Mead and Cranleigh Paddock in Lyndhurst for potential affordable housing redevelopment. And in November, as part of the formal public consultation process, Officers again expressed interest in both sites to further our affordable housing ambitions.*

*Since the County Council made its decision to close Solent Mead in February no further updates have been received, however we will write to the Chief Executive once again setting out our considerable interest in these sites, and I will be pleased to share the response with the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and Councillor Davies.*

*Note – this question was dealt with in writing, in the absence of Cllr J Davies.*

### **Question 4**

**From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole**

In the 22/23 figures, amongst our New Forest school age children there are 19% on free school meals compared to 18.3% across the county and 18.8% across the South East region. These figures equate to 4,022 children being in poverty. Having looked at the Residents action plan I note there is nothing directly focused on reducing Child Poverty in this district, does this administration feel there is no need for any direct action?

*Answer:*

*We fully recognise there are households in our district who struggle financially, which is why this Council, via the new Corporate Plan, is committed to several key priorities aimed at helping those in our community in the greatest need.*

*Figures from the DWP show an improvement in local figures with 12.7% of children in the district living in a family whose income was below 60% of average household income, down from 15% the year before and lower than the UK rate of 20.1%. (Source: [DWP Local Authority Data](#))*

*Whilst this Council is unable to directly influence some of the root causes of poverty there are several initiatives this Council supports.*

*The Cost-of-Living Steering group continues to raise the profile of such issues and is delivering joint projects with our partners, whilst an extensive Action Plan was presented to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 20 March 2024, and I would refer members to the published report.*

*We continue to support our Community Grants programme and CIL fund awards, we have hosted a Cost-of-Living Community Forum, and we are wholly supportive of the employment and training creation ambitions generated by the Freeport to improve access to jobs for local residents, and finally, along with our partners we aim together deliver over 800 new low-cost social housing rented properties across the district by the end of the year.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on an increasing number of children going into poverty, the Portfolio Holder reiterated his priorities in this area, including the establishment of the Community Forum, which supported key partnership working.*

## **Question 5**

### **From Cllr Sean Cullen to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary**

The Freeport has been in place for around 2 years and NFDC represents the interests of residents across the whole district so it is important that we have a clear aspirational plan for what businesses will move into the port and the impact they will have.

I wonder if the Leader can tell me what type of businesses are being encouraged to be part of the freeport and how they will further the interests of the national park, as they are now requested to do in law.

Answer:

*The Full Business Case submitted to government as part of the Freeport bidding process set out the target market sectors for tax sites. The business case envisages a wide range of users at Southampton Water including: automotive handling; port centric logistics; marine manufacturing; high technology businesses including AI; renewable energy; and advanced manufacturing.*

*Any decision to grant business rates relief to businesses moving onto tax sites ultimately rests with the Council as they are the ratings authority. A reason for not awarding relief could be that a business does not reflect the target sector of the Freeport or does not contribute to one of the three national Freeport objectives, namely supporting national hubs for trade, creating hotbeds of innovation or promoting regeneration. This allows for appropriate check and balances that occupiers benefiting from incentives are meeting the objectives of the Freeport.*

*The Freeport has recently appointed a Trade and Investment manager who will work with the Council and the Department of Business and Trade to maximise investment into Freeport tax sites. This is a major resource focusing on economic growth in the New Forest.*

*Whilst businesses choosing to locate in Freeport tax sites benefit from considerable tax incentives, they still have to comply with all appropriate legal requirements.*

*In relation to the National Park, On 3 April, Cabinet approved a set of priorities in respect of the legacy of the Solent Freeport for the New Forest. Environmental sustainability was identified as a core priority. The report identified that “a successful Freeport should see a significant enhancement of our National Park offer but also connectivity between our Waterside communities and the Park itself.”*

## **Question 6**

**From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp**

Will the Portfolio Holder invite representatives from Associated British Ports to come in and share what plans they have for Dibden Bay?

*Answer:*

*I am pleased to confirm that ABP representatives will be attending a briefing session on Tuesday 30 April for all Members at which they will be setting out their proposals for their Freeport sites and taking questions and I would urge those interested to attend.*

## **Question 7**

**From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp**

Will the Portfolio Holder please give clear details on the current state of play at the Fawley Waterside development? There has been much speculation in local media about the site being scaled back but these amount to mere rumours. Can the Council confirm that the figure of 1380 new homes is still a target?

*Answer:*

*The Council's understanding of the latest position was reported through written reports to both Place & Sustainability Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 7 March 2024, and subsequently to Cabinet on 3 April 2024.*

*This stated that Fawley Waterside is one of the biggest brownfield redevelopment schemes in the south of England which has a resolution to grant outline planning permission for a residential led mixed use scheme including approximately 10 hectares of land in the northern part of the site for business and industrial uses.*

*The S106 which would finalise the planning consent has not been signed by the developer which makes the timing of development uncertain.*

*New investors have come on board and there is a new management team. Initial discussions with that team have taken place and updated proposals are awaited.*

*Fawley Waterside remains a site that is allocated for development in the existing adopted Local Plan for 1380 dwellings.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question on the S106 agreement and timeframes, the Portfolio Holder confirmed a specific time frame had not yet been identified by the new investors at this stage.*

## **Question 8**

### **From Cllr Ian Murray to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole**

As Vice-Chairman of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, I have, as yet been unable to attend the new Community Forum. Can the Portfolio Holder please update us on its progress?

*Answer:*

*I am extremely pleased to update members with progress of the Forum. Our second event was held only recently on March 27<sup>th</sup> and focussed on improving Community Resilience across the many different communities of the New Forest.*

*With nearly 70 people in attendance representing the Council, our key partners and agencies involved in providing an emergency response, and our Towns and Parish Councils, attendees heard what is required to create community plans to prevent and respond to local issues such as flooding or power outages. Now launched, this work stream will continue to support Town and Parish Councils and be facilitated by Officers with responsibility for Emergency Planning. A follow up session will focus on the response to a simulated incident.*

*Our first Forum was held last October on the subject of Cost of Living and brought together nearly 80 people representing our key voluntary partners from many organisations across the district working with vulnerable people as well as those leading initiatives in our Town and Parish Councils. We received excellent feedback and it was attendees themselves who put forward the request for a Forum on Community Resilience.*

*Members have already heard how the cost of living work continues to be supported by officers and planning is already underway for a third forum in the Autumn.*

## **Second Questions**

### **Question 9**

#### **From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole**

While the police service has increased numbers of newly trained officers, there has continued to be a problem with retention which has led to more than 400 fewer police officers in total for Hampshire. Would NFDC's Portfolio Holder on Community Safety push for additional PCSOs to be recruited in the New Forest and write to the PCC asking for more Officers for our District? And is now the time for NFDC to consider recruiting our own ACSOs to combat ASB and low-level crime, to assist in our Community Safety priorities which Residents care about hugely?

*Answer:*

*Hampshire & IOW's Chief Constable Scott Chiltern, during a recent visit to meet with senior officers and the Leader, presented his new local policing model where specialist officers have been relocated back to local areas of the New Forest. Neighbourhood officers will be joined by patrol officers and CID to meet their aims of collectively supporting local area officers in responding to and preventing crimes.*

*With that in mind I wish to refer the member to a previous question from Cllr M Wade in April 2023 regarding the role of ACSOs, where this matter was answered previously.*

*Previously Hampshire County Council and relevant contributing authorities withdrew support for the Accredited Community Support Officer scheme as it was identified that the work of the service overlapped with the role of PCSOs. This model of Police engagement and community reassurance has extended further with the New Forest being supported by 20 full time PCSOs.*

*As chair of the safer New Forest, Community Safety Strategy and Delivery Group, I was encouraged to see partners from over 35 organisations across the district attend the community partnership event held in Lyndhurst for the development of the Partnership Action Group and to show their commitment to work collaboratively across the district.*

*With this partnership going from strength to strength and changes to the local policing model combined with our new Corporate Plan, which delivers a clear commitment to reducing the fear of crime, this collective approach focussing on victims and offenders will continue to ensure that the New Forest remains a safe place to live, work and visit.*

## **Question 10**

### **From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

As the Freeport is a key component on the Council's 2024-2028 Corporate Plan, and is the headline focus for the 'Prosperity' section of the plan. It is fair to say The Cabinet are enthusiastic about the Solent Freeport project and it's seen as a key driver of NFDC's future economic growth and investment plans for the District. However, what scrutiny, and checks and balances are in place to ensure that NFDC Residents and Businesses will genuinely benefit?

*Answer:*

*We are supportive of the Freeport process as it provides considerable benefit to businesses who want to invest in our district which can be a major contributor to our economic growth and to ensuring a supply of highly skilled jobs for our residents. Additionally, the ability of the Freeport to re-invest retained business rates provides an opportunity the New Forest and the region as a whole to identify and fund regeneration priorities.*

*A report on Freeport priorities went to the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 7 March 2024. Following that opportunity for elected Members to scrutinise the report, on 3 April Cabinet agreed the following priorities against which a successfully delivered Solent Freeport would be judged in relation to the New Forest:*

- *Transport and Wider infrastructure*
- *Employment and Skills*
- *Prosperous Communities*
- *Environmental Sustainability*
- *The Development of a Local Delivery Plan*

*Decisions in relation to the Freeport are made by the Solent Freeport Board. A sub-committee of the Freeport Board has been established to ensure the appropriate scrutiny and checks and balances are in place. The Leader of the Council sits on that sub-committee and is supported by the Council's S151 officer. In addition, Portsmouth City Council provide*

*an Accountable Body function to the Freeport and would be expected by government to ensure there is proper scrutiny of Freeport decision making.*

This page is intentionally left blank