

Council – 15 December 2025
Questions Under Standing Order 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Barry Dunning to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

Can the Portfolio holder for Planning and Economy, please update the Council on the current position of the ongoing legal dispute between this Council and Redrow/Barratt over the development at Lymington Shores in Lymington and will the footbridge be built or not?

Reply

The Council understands that Redrow and Hampshire County Council are working on resolving matters that are needed to allow for delivery.

From the District Councils perspective, there is a restriction on the sale and occupation of the remaining residential units on the site. This restriction is being complied with, and therefore, and as previously advised, there is no breach of planning control.

I have asked our officers to make enquiries with Redrow, however, with his own County Councillor hat on, perhaps directing enquiries into the County Council to seek their perspective on what is holding up delivery would be something Cllr Dunning could consider.

In response to a supplementary question asking the Portfolio Holder whether he agreed that it was time to resolve the matter and that if there were to be a financial settlement whether the money could go to Lymington. The Portfolio Holder agreed that he felt it was time for the matter to be resolved, but that it was not for him to settle it. He also expressed the view that should there be a financial settlement, he could see no reason why it should not be spent in Lymington.

Question 2

From Cllr Richard Young to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole

Could the portfolio holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing please update us on the progress of the CCTV programme?

Reply

In line with the council's commitment to invest in and enhance the CCTV network across the district, an additional 56 digital cameras have been installed over the past 12 months, with a further four due for completion shortly. Our ongoing commitment to reduce the fear of crime within our communities has been supported by Town and Parish councils, alongside ongoing partnerships with the retail sector. Where appropriate, these positive partnerships have enabled cameras to be mounted on the exterior of retail premises, improving operational coverage while reducing installation costs.

To strengthen system resilience and prepare for future digital upgrades, we will replace the analogue line currently used to transmit images to the control room. Throughout 2026, the remaining analogue cameras will be converted to digital transmission, creating opportunities to expand coverage and deliver long-term cost savings for the service.

Question 3

From Cllr David Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

The Phase 2 roll-out of the new waste service has thankfully avoided the significant issues we saw in Phase 1. However, many residents are frustrated by the lack of information and delays around both smaller and larger bin requests. Smaller bins matter for manoeuvrability and where there is limited storage space, while some larger households were promised bigger bins but are still waiting, relying on extra sacks in the meantime, which are often missed by the collecting teams who are focused on wheelie bins.

Can you confirm how many requests for small bins and large bins were made in Phases 1 and 2, how many of these requests have been satisfied, when the outstanding requests will be met, how long the longest wait has been, and what has caused the delays?

Reply

Across phases 1 and 2, 1,114 requests for extra capacity have so far been made, and 89% of these requests have been fulfilled. These requests have been prioritised over requests for smaller bins, as the rationale for the requests often relates to medical needs, children in nappies, and large families.

The 100 or so still awaiting larger bins will receive their extra capacity before Christmas and in the meantime, crews are instructed to collect extra bags. If you are aware of specific locations where this is not happening, please let us know and we can investigate further.

Smaller bins have only have a marginally smaller footprint when compared to standard bins. We are awaiting a restock of recycling containers from the supplier and will resume deliveries once we have these.

We have had a number of residents contacting us to cancel their smaller or larger bin requests as they prefer the containers they were issued in the main rollout. So, residents with an outstanding request for a smaller bin have been contacted to confirm whether the bin is still required, and at the time of writing 296 residents are waiting for smaller bins. While we await new supplies, we continue to collect their waste every week from their existing containers.

In response to a supplementary question regarding concern about wheeled bins blowing over in the wind and whether there were any recommendations to secure bins against gale conditions, the Portfolio Holder reported that he had not been made aware of this being a problem and that he would ask officers whether there was any advice they could provide to help to resolve this problem.

Question 4

From Cllr Colm McCarthy to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Given that Members and Officers had previously been warned about the likelihood of animal interference with food caddies, why did the Council underestimate both the operational implications and cost of switching “behind the gate” collections – resulting in a £1.5m annual pressure and additional vehicle requirements?

Reply

As detailed in the report discussed at Full Council tonight, the additional resource requirement amounting to £1.5m is not solely down to the issue of "behind the gate" collections. In fact, the full explanation is included in that report, and I don't propose to repeat that information again.

However, I would reiterate the complexity and significance of the service changes being introduced, which is transforming our services for the benefit of residents, staff and the environment. Quarter 2 of this year saw us reach our highest ever recycling rate of 43%, and that has been achieved with only 38% of households using the new service. Food waste tonnages have been higher than most other council areas – showing what a great success the service has been, and I don't shy away from the need to invest in our services to ensure continued progress is maintained.

Question 5

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

The Medium Term Financial Plan had been built on the expectation of new burdens funding for food waste to bring sites and early positive indicators from the fair funding review. Why were these assumptions not stress tested for downside risk, especially given the Government's track record of late changes to distribution formulas?

Reply

First, a point of clarity, the new burdens funding we were promised, time and time again I might add, was in relation to the kerbside food waste collection service, there is no food waste to bring sites service.

I thank Cllr Clark in advance for his support in calling on government to provide a multi year settlement for Local Authorities.

Not only would this empower us with a degree of stability but would further stop us from being at the whim of bold announcements, of additional support, being subsumed into the base grant and leaving us shocked at the negligible impact that it has in our overall funding.

For a myriad of reasons our Medium Term Financial Plan cannot be a fixed or static document, it must be a living organic financial plan that is capable of evolving and adapting to ever changing circumstances.

Perhaps it would help Cllr Clark if I were to read a short snippet from the October MTFP report; And I quote 'the government are currently analysing Fair Funding Review consultation responses, which will include significant representations from authorities who are now forecasting unplanned reductions in their financial settlement position. We cannot therefore be assured of any government backed financial position until the provisional settlement is released during December as illustrated by the potential range in Figure 1'.

The figure 1 as referred to then went on to show a rather nice-looking graph outlining the potential range in government funding, anywhere from £10.8m to as low as £7.1m.

So Cllr Clark, we constantly stress-test the assumptions, and we made it very clear back in October, as we have done now that there is no security around funding until the point that we receive the settlement.

Delaying the incorporation of latest information and knowledge within the MTFP until such time as our settlement is confirmed is simply too late in the financial planning cycle.

Your colleagues regularly accuse this administration of holding reserves that they feel are greater than those required, I wonder how they would react to an announcement that the Council was in line for an additional income of one and a half million pounds and that the Conservative administration had failed to incorporate in its financial planning or budget.

Let me save you the trouble of having to think about that, I know what they would do. They would accuse us of failing our residents and overtaxing them and would then come forward with a myriad of schemes to spend it.

As I said our Medium Term Financial Plan is a living plan available to adapt to the ever changing landscape of Local Government and I will let you into a secret, we are on course to deliver balanced budget for 2026/27.

Note: This question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr M Clark.

Question 6

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

There has been a rise in visits to the recycling centres and other bring-sites with the roll out of limited size wheelie bins. Can I ask what modelling was used to predict this behaviour change and why it wasn't budgeted for?

Reply

The council now provides more capacity for containing recycling on a weekly basis than it used to, under the old sack system. In addition, we offer larger recycling bins for those who need them and will collect small bundles of cardboard when left tidily next to a bin. Larger amounts of cardboard must be taken to local Household Waste Recycling Centres such as those located at Marchwood, Efford and Somerley. Here, there are specialised containers that can adequately deal with large quantities of cardboard. Our bring sites are for small quantities of excess recycling from households. Any businesses using these sites are doing so illegally, and our enforcement teams are working hard to tackle misuse via site visits and new CCTV.

I will accept that the issue at bring sites has been larger than we may have expected – but the overall financial prudence of this authority means that, where there are unexpected consequences, we are well-placed to react quickly and flexibly to prioritise our actions and maintain services.

In response to a supplementary question seeking to understand the reasons for the rise in materials at the bring sites and the modelling used, the Portfolio Holder reported he has already responded to the modelling query. In terms of the bring sites and the large quantities of cardboard which were being deposited, he reported that evidence suggested that this material was being left by businesses, whereas previously it may have been taken away with the domestic collections.

Question 7

From Cllr Sean Cullen to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

How many assisted collections were requested in phases 1 and 2 and did numbers increase during the rollout? How many have been requested for phase 3 and from the experience of phases 1 and 2, how confident are you that you would be able to satisfy the demand?

Reply

Our data on this does not differentiate between a new request, and an annual renewal for an existing assisted collection user. However, I can say that in May 2025 we had a total of 830 assisted collection users, and as of Dec we have 1,613. Of the requests received in this period, which as stated above includes new requests and renewals, 44% were from phase one addresses, 21% from phase two addresses and 35% from phase three addresses.

As of 21 October, this year, the council introduced further checks on assisted collection requests coming in, to ensure that our resources can be focussed on helping those residents in genuine need of this important service.

We are confident that we can accommodate the support required for our residents that genuinely need the additional assistance.

In response to a supplementary question seeking the percentage of assisted collection requests being denied and the reasons for the refusal, the Portfolio Holder reported that he did not have that information available at the meeting and that he would response directly to the councillor.

Question 8

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

In the spirit of devolution and understanding it will take a level of resourcing, transferring assets to the people of the New Forest District will be a positive lasting testament of this authority's legacy. Therefore, will this administration support this council devolving assets to Town and

Parish councils across the district, where they have requested it to do so, where it is practical and sustainable to do so.

Reply

I am supportive of the recent letter that has been sent by officers to Town & Parish clerks setting out very clearly the next steps in our process towards delivering on our Strategic Asset Management Plan. This includes the ability for the Town & Parish councils to advise the district of assets that they would like us to consider for transfer.

Cllr Wade will however be very aware of the significant task ahead of us as Councillors, and of our officers in supporting the establishment of a new authority in just over 2 years' time. I think it's important therefore that we continue to manage expectations and confirm that a large number of asset transfers to town and parish councils will not be feasible. In terms of delivering on our strategic asset management action plan, our priority remains on getting a really clear understanding of our own asset base, making improvements where possible, and building a comprehensive asset list, to include information on where town and parishes have expressed a will to take on any assets, for future consideration by the new unitary authority.

In response to a supplementary question regarding the transfer to assets to town and parish councils, when requested, where it was practical and sustainable to do so in order to leave a positive legacy, the Leader reported that she supported this in theory, but had concerns about how this would take place. She reported she would consult with officers and the relevant Portfolio Holder, as she supported the aspiration to leave a positive legacy to the residents of the New Forest.

Question 9

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

It was good to hear Cllr Heron state at the most recent Resources and Transformation Scrutiny Panel that New Street Public Conveniences in Lymington will be upgraded. Does the Portfolio Holder have a timescale for when these upgrades will be completed?

Reply

I welcome the question, as despite seeing Cllr Davies taking credit for the New Street block being identified as a priority for renovation, it gives me an opportunity to confirm that I have had oversight of the evidence led condition survey process which has resulted in the New Street toilet as being identified as a strong candidate for upgrading. Officers are in the process of devising the detailed programme, which I understand will be included in the Capital Programme for Council consideration and approval in February.

I will welcome Cllr Davies' endorsement of the administration's budget when it comes to this chamber in February to ensure that these improvements can be achieved within the next 2 financial years.

In response to a supplementary question asking that this be a full refurbishment of public conveniences, the Portfolio Holder reported he noted this request.

Question 10

From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Ahead of Phase 3 of the introduction of wheelie bins next year, what review of communication to Residents is being considered to mitigate ongoing concerns such as missed daily collections, and the general consensus of Waterside Residents disappointed by the whole bin bag delivery process? Will Ward Cllrs be included in steering groups and be utilised to assist in updating Residents when required, supporting our hard working operational teams?

Reply

We understand that missed collections are currently at a level typical in an operation of this scale, and none of the data I am seeing in my role as Cabinet member is suggesting a live issue, but I'm happy for Cllr Wade to share any concerns he has with me directly.

In terms of communication, residents will again receive three separate direct communications to their household ahead of the phase 3 go live

date, and all the feedback and evidence we have is that this was both clear and effective in the first two phases.

We acknowledge that our Liberal Democrat colleagues have been very vocally stoking the fear of missing out on free bin bags in the Waterside, whilst we prioritised our legal responsibilities of actually collecting the waste. The good news is that this task is completed and most of these residents will be able to replace their council provided bin bags with a council provided wheelie bin instead once phase 3 is up and running.

We will continue to keep councillors updated through regular emails and planned briefing sessions, and conscious that Cllr Wade and a number of other colleagues were not able to attend the most recent briefing for members by waste officers, on Thursday 27 November, I can of course remind you that there is regular opportunity to engage and a whole host of relevant information already available to him, as a phase three member, on the Members site.

In response to a supplementary question regarding ward members being included in the waste steering group, the Portfolio Holder reported that this had been asked before and reminded members of the regular briefings for all members as well as the weekly updates provided to members to ensure that all were kept informed.