

Leader of the Council – Budget Speech - 20 February 2017

“Delivering our Promises – Securing a better future for the New Forest”

In May 2015 New Forest residents showed their trust in the conservative administration of New Forest. Last year I highlighted that we had many challenges to face and many changes were needed. I urged all councillors long standing or newly elected to observe our manifesto and its pledges in conjunction with the corporate plan as we go forward. As I set out our budget for 2017 -2018 I will give you a mid-term report of how I think we are doing.

We recognised that to secure a better future for the New Forest we needed to **support local businesses to grow and prosper**. At the New Forest and Hampshire County Show we showcased our help to local business answering questions on Business start-ups, planning questions, broadband enquiries and social media advice - just some of the ways the Council supports New Forest business. The Countess of Wessex and members of the eM3 Local Enterprise Partnership were our highest profile visitors among hundreds that visited our stand.

Our partnership with Creative England which utilises the many natural attributes of the New Forest has generated in its first few months an estimated £80,000 for the local economy.

The successful New Forest Expo held at Brockenhurst College also served to highlight both the strength of local business and our partnership with the New Forest Business Partnership. At the Expo 80 local businesses were able to showcase their products and services. Following this success the business partnership will be following this up in 2017 again at Brockenhurst.

The eleventh annual New Forest Brilliance in Business Awards was another success with seven local businesses highlighted with awards, presented by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, President of the New Forest Business Partnership. Congratulations also to Hythe for becoming village of the year 2017. I would like to thank Mathew Lawson for all his work as Chairman of the Business Partnership.

I am committed to ensuring support to local businesses both large and small as a priority.

We need to invest in the next generation of our workforce and I am pleased that since 2010 we have recruited 30 apprentices of which 5 have gone on to gain employment with the Council, 4 have undertaken further apprenticeships and others have found employment outside of the council.

Last year I talked about the fiscal challenges we faced and the changes we needed to make in order to **keep Council Tax as low as possible**. We again face further significant reductions in government funding and the government is looking to us to increase Council Tax by £5 at Band D, an increase of 3.2%. (Band D £163.36 -2017/18)

In maintaining our good housekeeping we will ensure we deliver a balanced budget and live within our means. We have overseen the slim down of our senior management structure which is now completed and working well. We will continue to improve the management of the Council's resources to help make us less reliant on government grant. We have done this by looking at all we do and funding what is important to our community, protecting existing revenue streams and identifying new areas that could increase our annual revenue.

This approach has led us to review our contribution to the visitor destination. The establishment of a new company driven by local business with some initial support from us.

This will provide support for the visitor economy of the New Forest and when the Company is fully up and running save the taxpayer £140,000 per annum. It is both a good deal for business and for the taxpayer.

Our investment in rebuilding the beach huts at Milford on Sea will provide a new improved facility to beach hut owners, enhance the protection to our coastline and deliver annual revenue of £44,000, a return of 4.4% on the net beach hut investment. In addition the extra work we have carried out to the promenade will enhance the amenity for all visitors to Milford.

Looking ahead we will continue to both support our local economy and increase annual revenue with our new Asset Investment Strategy. This we will approach in a prudent and sensible manner. These are not easy decisions to take but we have taken these brave steps to ensure we **maintain and improve frontline services**.

We made a commitment to provide more affordable homes and this month we will be delivering 21 newly built council homes at New Milton. We will be looking very closely at the recently published Housing White Paper to identify opportunities for providing more and affordable homes.

Our special environment means that we have to work hard to protect it and we welcome new powers we have received that will enable us to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for fly tipping. We will not hesitate in protecting our special environment.

We recognise that many of our residents are vulnerable so we have continued to develop our community alarm service "Appletree Careline". To improve the service we launched a new wristband service, which quickly gets help to an individual when it is needed. In our review of Community Grants we agreed to give New Forest Disability Information Service an increase in their grant of £7,500.

We have obtained planning permission to provide a much needed new cemetery on the former military base at Calshot.

Keeping weekly rubbish and recycling collections unchanged is important to us. This key service we are continually looking to improve and as we promised there are no plans to change the method, black and clear sacks. We recently launched Remind Me, a text messaging service which reminds residents to put their glass out the evening before collection is due. Within the first two weeks we had almost 10,000 residents sign up for this service.

I am pleased to report that in February 2017 we reached an all-time high in our Health and Leisure Centre membership, 7,616 members. We will continue to invest in our centres Totton and Lymington benefited from new equipment, last year and we have plans to refurbish Ringwood 2017.

We will continue to deliver on our commitment to provide good frontline services that our residents want. We are not afraid to make changes and look at new ways of working in order to deliver better services for our community.

Looking ahead reviewing our local plan is a key action of 2017-18. The need for more housing is a serious and difficult challenge for our community within our special environment. The challenge we face is how we locally respond to a national shortage. I believe we will in the future see more housing and development. What we have to ensure is that we **listen to our local residents** and deliver what is both needed and acceptable to the New Forest. In all cases we will try to influence outcomes that residents want.

A good example of how we are prepared to listen and improve services is in the building of two new Public Conveniences with “Changing places” facilities. One of our residents Sarah Brisdion, has a son Hadley who has Cerebral Palsy. She had been campaigning for improved facilities. We made contact with her and took note of the special requirements of her son in designing the new facilities as a result they are fully accessible for Hadley. The Council is now named as one of Hadley’s Heroes for its response to her campaign.

We recognise that we are part of our community and we need **to work with partners** and engage with our local communities to deliver good outcomes for the New Forest. Throughout the year we have recognised that we are part of our community.

Engaging with future generations is in particular a highlight for me in my role and visits from young students to the Council chamber to learn about democracy and how the council works are important engagements for the Council. . The young people also provided comments and perspectives on the Council that we can learn from.

The Volunteers evening was a great success and showcased the work of many in our community. I would like to thank the Chairman of the Council for his efforts in instigating this event and I hope we build on it in future years.

The success of the military parade to mark the granting of the Freedom of the New Forest District to the 17 Port & Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps was one of many events where we successfully engaged with our local community.

I mentioned the Chairman of the Council earlier and I would like to thank him for his work in promoting the Council and also thank the staff of the Council, many of whom contribute in ways beyond their council role. I was impressed with Totton Health and Leisure Centre staff who raised more than £15,000 for four local charities with a big indoor cycling event.

I would also like to highlight Jake Hoy, one of our Health and Leisure lifeguards who was shortlisted for an award by the Royal Life Saving Society, a drowning prevention charity, in recognition of his outstanding contribution.

During the last year the future of the District council has come under much scrutiny with long drawn out discussions on devolution. The Council has taken an active role working closely with neighbouring local authorities. We shared in a joint piece of work undertaken by Price Waterhouse Cooper to help us better understand options. Over the last year mine and the Chief Executive’s time spent on trying to find a sensible and acceptable workable solution was considerable. To date this has come to nothing, but we remain very much engaged in the development of the discussion. We have watched closely the discussion in Dorset on Local Government Reorganisation and we await with interest that outcome.

During all of these discussions our approach was to assess the benefit to our community of any change in arrangement. We remain open to support any action which brings clear benefit to our community. During these discussions which at times were difficult we maintained good relationships with all councils.

The Council has a good track record of working with neighbouring Council’s. With Hampshire County Council we together delivered the successful Ringwood Gateway. We currently undertake on their behalf work under the Highways Agency, together with highways grass cutting. We are part of the Countywide Waste Partnership (Project Integra). We share our Treasury Management service with them giving us the benefits derived from their scale and broader knowledge base. We work very closely with them on the Supporting Troubled Families programme which brings benefits to their care service and our housing and housing

benefits service. We work very well with the Police, Fire and Rescue Services and other local bodies in the delivery of our Community Safety Partnership. We share our Internal Audit Service with Christchurch, East Dorset and Purbeck. We share some of our Planning Services with the National Park. We work closely with and support our 37 Town and Parish Councils on areas of common interest, e.g. tree maintenance contract.

Looking to the future we see the potential for greater working together with neighbouring councils and partners in order to deliver improved outcomes for our community.

For now the role of the district council is as it always has been to carry on delivering good services like collecting your rubbish and recycling, administering planning, managing council housing, providing housing advice and homelessness prevention, maintaining public toilets, supporting CCTV in towns and villages, operating cemeteries, caring for the coastline, keeping our streets clean and grass cut, administering taxi licencing, monitoring air quality, running electoral registration, recovering stray dogs, controlling food hygiene, maintaining trees, providing community and leisure services, and offering pest control services. Next year we will do all this and more for £3.14 per week (Band D).

We intend to get on with this job and deliver what I believe to be good value for money for our community.

I said at the beginning, I would use this Budget Speech as a mid term report on how we are doing on what we set out in our manifesto.

My report conclusion is that we are delivering on our promises and securing a better future for the New Forest.

My grateful thanks to all councillors, staff, cabinet members and our chief executive in getting us to this point. I commend the Budget to you.