The New Forest is an area of southern England which includes one of the largest remaining tracts of unenclosed pasture land, heathland and forest in the heavily populated south east of England. It covers south-west Hampshire and extends into south-east Wiltshire and towards east Dorset. It is a unique place of ancient history, fascinating wildlife and stunning beauty and was established as a royal hunting preserve.

The local government administrative area of New Forest District Council (290 square miles) includes the New Forest National Park (206 square miles). Within the district there are 145 square miles of Crown land, managed by the Forestry Commission.

The New Forest is a working forest that has prospered for nearly 1000 years. Many of the agricultural practices conceded by the Crown in historical times to local people are still retained. The most significant of these is the depasturing of ponies, cattle, pigs and donkeys in the open forest by authorised local inhabitants known as Commoners. These unique agricultural commoning practices are administered by the Verderers.

The district council was created on 1 April 1974 and was a merger of the borough of Lymington, New Forest Rural District and part of Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District. The district is one of the most populated in England (179,236) not to be a unitary authority and within its boundaries there are 37 active Town and Parish Councils. Hampshire County Council are responsible for upper tier services.

Operating within the heart of the district council area is the National Park Authority established in 2005. The National Park is the planning authority for its area. In other service areas there are shared responsibilities and close collaborative working with the district council. Approximately 70% of the population of the district live in the New Forest District Council authority area in a number of medium sized towns. To the south and east of the district border there lies 40 miles of coastline.

The broad range of organisations and community groups that exist means that the council works collaboratively with and in the community to deliver solutions.

The New Forest is home to the third largest economy in Hampshire, with a total Gross Value Added of £4.4bn. The district contains over 9,000 businesses in total, which is more than any other local authority in Hampshire, include the cities of Southampton and Portsmouth. 85% of businesses in the district are micro in size employing fewer than 10 people. Self-employment is relatively high at over 19% and unemployment is consistently lower than in the rest of the country. Leisure, tourism and marine along with their associated supply chains are significant employment and economic sectors within the district. The council works closely with the New Forest Business Partnership and ‘Helping local business grow’ is a priority.

Average earnings are low with 60% of the working population earning less than the UK average. This, and the high average house price, results in significant cross commuting between those who work in the forest but can’t afford to live there, and those who can afford to live within the district but work elsewhere. The district council is located between the two major conurbations of Southampton and Bournemouth.

The very special nature of the New Forest makes it an extremely attractive place to live; both for those in work and those wishing to retire (28.5% of the population is over 65). Housing development is made more difficult by many of the environmental constraints of the area.
New Forest District Council

Housing, and particularly affordable housing for local people is a particular issue in the district. The district council manages its own housing stock (5,021 properties) and there are in excess of 3,000 people on the housing waiting list.

The New Forest district local plan review provides the opportunity to shape the district over the next twenty years and this will be an important process for the council to complete. Early indications are that not all identified housing need will be met. There are opportunities for a significant change, particularly in the Totton and Waterside area.

The vast majority of services are provided by in house teams. This includes the operation of five high quality Health & Leisure Centres, a Housing Services Building Works team as well as Refuse and Recycling, Grounds Maintenance and Street Scene. The council employs 759 FTEs with a small number of services provided by third parties or through shared service arrangements.

The council’s assets consist of five Health and Leisure Centres, two depots, two administrative offices and a number of local town and amenity car parks. Other than these primarily operational assets, the council owns few investment opportunities.

In May 2015 the council’s new Conservative administration won 58 out of 60 seats at the district council election. They set about aligning their manifesto pledges to the council’s Corporate Plan (March 2016) with their priorities to secure a better future for the community. The priorities are:

- Helping local business to grow
- More homes for local people
- Service outcomes for the community
- Protecting the local character of our place

These priorities were underpinned by:
- Living within our means
- Working with others to achieve more
- Service outcomes for the community
- Protecting the local character of our place

In the last two years significant change has taken place within the senior management of the organisation and in the way in which the council goes about its business as the council has set about rebalancing its expenditure and income in light of the significant reduction in central government funding. During this period services have maintained a consistent level of delivery. There is recognition that despite these changes the organisation needs to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver on its priorities.

New Forest District Council remains committed to delivering the priorities set out in the 2016-2020 Corporate Plan: Helping local business grow, More homes for local people, Service outcomes for the community, Protecting the local character of our place, Working with others to achieve more and Living within our means.

Work to deliver the Hurst Spit defence project alongside the Environmental Agency has continued and the coastal protection scheme is set to benefit communities in the local area. £218,020 in grants was approved this year for 15 local not-for-profit and voluntary groups as part of the community grants scheme. We also continued to work with local charities, including donating IT equipment we no longer use to the local homeless charity “Jamie’s Computers”.

Net Savings and improved income generation totalling £1.377m have absorbed pay and price increases across the Portfolios totalling some £1130m, and have also made an important contribution towards offsetting the reductions in government resources. The residual required increase in Council Funding has been achieved by an increase in Council Tax.
**UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL PLACE AND PRIORITY SETTING**

Average earnings (full time) in the New Forest are £667 per week.

People make 13.5m day trips to the New Forest each year generating £120m and supporting more than 2,500 jobs.

9,000 businesses

We receive 165 homelessness applications a year and prevent 282 other households from becoming homeless.

5,021 council houses

142,234 district residents are eligible to vote

9,000 households are supported with housing benefit and/or council tax reduction.

Leisure, tourism and marine are significant employment sectors within the district. We work closely with the New Forest Business Partnership and the New Forest Tourism Association to boost the economic viability of the area.

We grant planning permission to over 1,000 planning applications for new dwellings per year, and around 284 new homes are built here every year, 62 of them being affordable new homes. With over 3,000 people on the HomeSearch register, ‘more homes for local people’ is one of our key priorities.

We provide over 100 local services that our residents value, including refuse, street cleaning, benefits, health and leisure, and housing advice. We regularly review our services to understand how we can improve and what our customers want.

We recognise the area’s unique qualities and characteristics - our Local Plan shapes development in the area, and we work to keep the area a clean, green, and safe place. NFDC is responsible for areas outside the National Park, and outside Forestry Commission Crown Lands.

We have a role to play in protecting and improving the New Forest. We know that we can’t realise our ambitions in isolation and work closely with the National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission, town and parish councils, local businesses, and numerous local groups.

We continually review activities and services to identify opportunities for savings and opportunities to generate income to address significant reductions in government funding, whilst at the same time maintaining services that are important to our customers.
Our Economic Development Service continues to work with a variety of partners to deliver a range of information and advice, and has organised and led 32 events during 2017/18. Examples include providing specific workshops on GDPR legislations, dedicated 1-1 business clinics and a seminar on securing purchasing opportunities with the District Council.

We were involved in the New Forest Partnership Awards, and the New Forest Brilliance in Business Awards 2017, celebrating businesses that achieve outstanding results which benefit their workforce, their local community and the New Forest economy as a whole. The overall winner of the awards were Cyclexperience in Brockenhurst, who play an important part in the local economy by not only providing significant seasonal employment, but also in ensuring that users of the cycle hire service use other local, independent businesses and respect the natural forest that they are visiting.

Our specialist team launched a free business advice service for New Forest businesses in July, providing bespoke information on areas such as grants, planning, regulations and business growth.

We continue to see benefits of our partnership with Creative England to encourage filming in the district, with around a dozen documentaries filmed in the area this year. Fawley Power Station was used as part of the set for the most recent Star Wars film, generating an additional £1 million in the local economy during filming.

We rehoused 389 households from the home search register in 2017/18. However, there are still over 3,000 applicants on the register seeking council housing which we will continue to work hard to address.

The Local Plan continues to be developed and refined and will be published for wider consultation in the Summer of 2018. It will include proposals for 10,000 new houses in the district over the next 20 years.

284 additional homes were built this year, with 62 of these being affordable. Our Housing Strategy aims to improve availability of genuinely affordable homes, and identifies a range of ways in which the council will enhance housing options available and the supply of affordable housing for the benefit of local people. The council, in its capacity as housing authority, acquired a further 16 homes for social rent during 17/18.

We have also been awarded almost £1 million of Community Housing Funds (CHF), part of a national scheme for areas where second home ownership is high. This will allow the council to promote and assist the development of community housing schemes in the future, which could include co-operatives, co-housing, self-build and Community Land trusts.

We have been involved in a number of projects to assist the wellbeing of our community. We have been involved in a number of projects to assist the well-being of our community. This has included targeting high levels of childhood obesity, and introducing activities to help relieve the symptoms of dementia.

In total, over 10 million waste and recycling collections were made during the year, with only 0.06% reported as missed. Two new public conveniences have been rebuilt at New Milton and Lymington which continue to be well-received within the local communities.

The annual community litter pick was once again supported by volunteers over several weekends.

We launched the Eat Out, Eat Well public health scheme in July, and continued to carry out regular food hygiene inspections across the district which provides reassurance to both residents and visitors when eating out.

Our Health and Leisure centre membership has increased from 7,616 up to 8,208 over the course of the year. Our Ringwood centre was reopened following significant investment in the facility, and we also launched a new “New Forest Health & Leisure” app which enables users to book classes quickly and access a host of information.
Work to deliver the Hurst Spit defence project alongside the Environmental Agency has continued and the coastal protection scheme is set to benefit communities in the local area.

We continue to work hard to remove abandoned vehicles, with 54 being removed this year compared to 60 last year, and 26 in 2015/16.

Our Milford-on-Sea beach huts and seafront improvement scheme was completed in time for Summer 2017. The innovative design and engineering behind the scheme has been recognised in a series of prestigious awards throughout the course of the year.

King George V Recreation Ground was enhanced to include new footpaths, improved drainage and a bespoke dog activity area. The dog park is part of our “Greenway” project and this is the first of many similar projects that will improve dog walking facilities across the district.

With our support, The Eling Tide Mill experience reopened in April 2018 after a major refurbishment project. This included installing new footpaths and wooden boardwalks and improving access to open spaces around Bartley Water and Goatee Beach.

£218,020 in grants was approved this year for 15 local not-for-profit and voluntary groups as part of the community grants scheme. We also continued to work with local charities, including donating IT equipment we no longer use to the local homeless charity “Jamie’s Computers”.

We support the Forest Arts Forum, which allows organisations such as hArt, CODA, Forest Arts and Forest Forge to use the arts to tackle issues such as social isolation and bullying.

We continue to undertake a national pilot with Sport England – the “Social Prescribing” project to explore the benefits of basing Active Lifestyle Officers in GP surgeries targeting hard to reach patients.

Alongside other public sector organisations, we participated in “Our Day” on 21 November, a national tweetathon to highlight public services. We posted nearly 100 tweets about our staff and services, achieving a Twitter reach of a staggering 749,000 people.

We have an ongoing partnership with the National Parks Authority and Forestry Commission and work together on initiatives such as litter picking, and were recently involved in a multi-agency approach to improve safety and licencing of local vehicles. We are also collaborating with our partners in order to contribute to the New Forest National Park partnership plan.

Net Savings and improved income generation totalling £1.377m have absorbed pay and price increases across the Portfolios totalling some £1.130m, and have also made an important contribution towards offsetting the reductions in government resources. The residual required increase in Council Funding has been achieved by an increase in Council Tax.

Our draft Residential Property Asset Investment strategy was approved by full council in December 2017, which will give us the opportunity to purchase residential properties and become a private sector landlord with the benefit of a proven track record in rental property management.

The undertaking of several service reviews, additional income generation, and a review of our asset maintenance and replacement programme resulted in overall savings during the year against the original 2017/18 revenue budget.

We have continued to deliver our services alongside a reduction in headcount equivalent to 21 full time posts over the past year, representing 2.7% of the workforce.
The Council’s net worth increased by £2,551m in 2017/18. Usable Reserves grew by £1.1m at the end of 2017/18, to £53.5m. The Treasury Management Strategy allows for up to £40m to be invested long term. The Capital Programme for 2017/18 totalled £23,237m, including major repairs to the council’s housing stock, new homes, the replacement of vehicles and plant, the Eling Experience project and the first investment property purchase for several years, in line with the strategy adopted in February 2017.

Treasury Investment income grew to £820,000, £150,000 up on 2016/17.

Predicted budget deficit of £2m
**CAPACITY TO DELIVER**

**Current position**
- Staff turnover: 7.7%
- 77% of vacancies are filled first time
- 7 apprentices and 17 management development apprenticeships
- Training spend per employee: £296

**Organisational strategy**

**Future position 2022**
- Aligning future organisation with delivery of the corporate plan
- Increased partnering and collaboration with others to reduce costs and transform service delivery
- Continuing on our path to act more business-like with targeted additional income generation
- Aiming to maximise income from local government finance reform
- Encouraging smarter working and the use of digital interaction, transforming our approach to customer services

**Challenges**
1. With further reductions in funding, what are our arrangements to deliver with less?
2. Can the organisation sustain capability and capacity with its existing workforce?
3. Are arrangements in place to support future smarter working?
Key performance measures

Residual household waste per household
- TARGET: 500kgs
- 2017/18: 490kgs
- 2016/17: 499kgs

Amount sent for reuse, recycling and composting
- TARGET: 31%
- 2017/18: 32%
- 2016/17: 31%

Processing of major planning applications within 13 weeks
- TARGET: 90%
- 2017/18: 95.71%
- 2016/17: 93.5%

Completed high risk food hygiene inspections
- TARGET: 95%
- 2017/18: 99%
- 2016/17: 99%

Council tax percentage collected
- TARGET: 98.9%
- 2017/18: 98.8%
- 2016/17: 99.06%

Total applicants on the Homesearch register
- TARGET: NA
- 2017/18: 3,345
- 2016/17: 3,307

Mean Gender Pay Gap
- TARGET: NA
- 2017/18: 6.95%
- 2016/17: NA

Median Gender Pay Gap
- TARGET: NA
- 2017/18: -9.48%
- 2016/17: NA