

24 FEBRUARY 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 24 February 2025

- * Cllr David Hawkins (Chairman)
- * Cllr John Sleep (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

John Adams
* Alan Alvey
* Peter Armstrong
* Geoffrey Blunden
* Hilary Brand
* Mark Clark
* Steve Clarke
* Jill Cleary
* Kate Crisell
* Sean Cullen
* Jack Davies
* Steve Davies
* Philip Dowd
* Barry Dunning
Jacqui England
* Richard Frampton
* Allan Glass
* David Harrison
* Matthew Hartmann
* John Haywood
Jeremy Heron
* Nigel Linford
* Patrick Mballa

Councillors:

* Colm McCarthy
* David Millar
* Ian Murray
* Stephanie Osborne
Alan O'Sullivan
Adam Parker
* Dave Penny
* Neville Penman
* Dan Poole
* Caroline Rackham
* Alvin Reid
* Joe Reilly
* Janet Richards
* Barry Rickman
Steve Rippon-Swaine
* Michael Thierry
* Derek Tipp
* Neil Tungate
* Alex Wade
* Malcolm Wade
* Christine Ward
* Phil Woods
* Richard Young

*Present

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Tanya Coulter, Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Richard Knott, Joanne McClay, Chris Noble, Daniel Reynafarje, Joe Tyler and Matt Wisdom.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs England, Heron, O'Sullivan and Rippon-Swaine.

46 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2024, be confirmed.

47 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

All Members of the Council had been granted the necessary dispensations to speak and vote on the Scheme of Members' Allowances, the annual budget and setting of the Council tax for 2025/26.

Cllr A Wade declared, for transparency purposes, his employment by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority, a precepting authority in respect of the overall level of Council tax.

Cllr J Davies declared his employment by a taxi operator, subject to the Taxi Policy Review. He confirmed he would not speak, nor vote on the item.

48 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**New Councillor Welcome**

The Chairman extended a very warm welcome and offered his congratulations to Councillor Richard Frampton, who was attending his first Full Council meeting, following his election earlier in the month.

Engagements

The Chairman reported on the following recent engagements:-

11 December

The Chairman was delighted to attend the re-opening of Totton Police Station with the Police and Crime Commissioner. He spoke to those in attendance about supporting the police and their role in the community and welcomed the reopening of the station.

25 January

The Chairman represented the District at the Mayor of Gosport's Civic Service at the Freedom Church in Gosport.

6 February

The Board of Trustees of New Forest Disability hosted an event to celebrate lottery grant funding awarded through the access to justice fund, to run a very worthwhile project - Independent Living Through Advice. The Chairman was delighted to attend this event.

Civic Service

The Chairman reminded Members of his Civic Service taking place on 23 March and encouraged those Members who had not yet responded to do so, to support the arrangements for this occasion.

Procedures

The Chairman confirmed that he intended to take item 14 on the agenda shortly after Leader's Announcements. It was necessary to debate and resolve the motion,

to allow the Council to decide if it wanted to use the electronic voting system for recorded votes on the key budget issues later on the agenda.

As the Council continued to use its electronic voting system, and with a significant amount of business on the agenda, he welcomed Members' support and patience with the smooth running of the meeting.

49 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

The Leader reported that she was actively engaging with the process to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority, with elections planned for May 2026.

She highlighted that the government had invited local authorities in Hampshire and the Solent to work together on the development of proposals for local government reorganisation. Regardless of the Council's views on reorganisation itself, it was in its interest to engage in this process and achieve the best outcome for local residents and for council staff.

Work collectively with leaders and chief executives across the region had commenced and the Leader had also engaged with the two New Forest MPs.

The Leader confirmed that she would continue to make strong representations for an outcome that was the best fit for the communities of the New Forest. Cabinet would consider a report in March ahead of the government deadline for an interim plan by 21 March 2025.

Alongside this, the Leader was beginning to review priorities, with the aim of delivering a strong legacy across the Council's services and assets. She thanked staff for their unwavering focus on meeting in the needs of residents in uncertain times.

50 NOTICE OF MOTION - ELECTRONIC VOTING

The Chairman took this item of business ahead of its scheduled place on the agenda, to allow for the Council to decide if it wanted to vote electronically for the purpose of key budget decisions later on the agenda.

The Leader moved the following motion in accordance with Standing Order 21:-

"This Council notes that:-

- 1. The Council's Constitution allows for votes by show of hand, and discretionary recorded votes, to be taken by electronic means.*
- 2. The use of electronic voting has been successfully used at recent Council meetings.*
- 3. In order to allow for recorded votes on key budget decisions to be taken electronically, a minor amendment to the Council's Standing Orders for Meetings is required.*

This Council resolves that:-

4. *The Council's Standing Orders for Meetings, as contained within the Constitution, be amended as follows with immediate effect:-*

52A.2 – At the Chairman's discretion, the mode of voting on a matter under 52A.1 shall be by electronic means if available to the Council. The Chairman shall inform the Council if a recorded vote is to be taken electronically, immediately before the vote is taken. Alternatively, where a vote is taken on a matter under 52A.1, each member shall state whether they have voted for the proposition, or against the proposition, or have abstained from voting. The manner in which each member voted shall be recorded in the minutes."

It was clarified that electronic voting would not replace the use of a secret ballot for contested positions, such as the chairmen and vice-chairman of committees and panels.

The Leader thanked Group Leaders for their support in bringing the motion to Council.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that:-

1. The Council's Constitution allows for votes by show of hand, and discretionary recorded votes, to be taken by electronic means.
2. The use of electronic voting has been successfully used at recent Council meetings.
3. In order to allow for recorded votes on key budget decisions to be taken electronically, a minor amendment to the Council's Standing Orders for Meetings is required.

This Council resolves that:-

4. The Council's Standing Orders for Meetings, as contained within the Constitution, be amended as follows with immediate effect:-

52A.2 – At the Chairman's discretion, the mode of voting on a matter under 52A.1 shall be by electronic means if available to the Council. The Chairman shall inform the Council if a recorded vote is to be taken electronically, immediately before the vote is taken. Alternatively, where a vote is taken on a matter under 52A.1, each member shall state whether they have voted for the proposition, or against the proposition, or have abstained from voting. The manner in which each member voted shall be recorded in the minutes."

51 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2025/26

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 24 January 2025. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

Cllr J Davies placed on record his thanks to the Chairman of the Audit Committee for this work on the strategy and generally, as Cllr J Davies would shortly be leaving the committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 to 2027/28 including the Annual Treasury Management Investment Strategy for 2025/26 (and the remainder of 2024/25), and the Treasury Indicators contained within, as provided in Appendix 1 be approved; and
2. That authority is delegated to the Section 151 Officer, who in turn delegates to Hampshire County Council's Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Operations, as agreed in the Service Level Agreement, to manage all Council investments and borrowing according to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement as appropriate.

52 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2025/26

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the Audit Committee meeting held on 24 January 2025. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the Investment Strategy 2025/26 provided in Appendix 1, be approved.

53 TAXI POLICY REVIEW

Cllr J Davies declared his employment by a taxi operator. He confirmed he would not speak, nor vote on this item.

Cllr Tungate introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting held on 10 January 2025. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Taxi Licensing Policy, be approved.

54 LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

Cllr Tungate introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting held on 10 January 2025. Cllr Young seconded the motion.

Cllr Millar proposed an amendment, specifically in respect of Pavement Licence Renewal Applications, to reduce the £250 charge in the recommendations, to £50. Cllr Harrison seconded the amendment.

Members speaking for the amendment highlighted the debate at the General Purposes and Licensing Committee which considered an amendment to remove the charge altogether. The support provided to local businesses during the pandemic was highlighted, and how it had worked well to ensure the viability of a number of local enterprises. The small number of businesses operating with these

licences was noted, alongside the concern of some Members that the overall costs being faced by businesses, such as national insurance rises, presented real difficulty.

Members speaking against the amendment referred to the framework that a licence provided with a cost recovery charge, to ensure the terms of such a licence were upheld. There were some concerns about waiving costs in one specific area, and how fair this might be considered by those seeking other licensable activities from the Council.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2025–26 as set out in Appendix 1 be approved; and
2. That the power to set the scale of fees and charges for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences, including to consider any objections made in respect of the proposed fees, be delegated to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee.

55 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/26

Cllr Cleary introduced the report and moved the recommendations from the HR Committee meeting held on 9 January 2025. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the Pay Policy Statement 2025/26, be approved.

56 REPORT OF CABINET - 5 FEBRUARY 2025

PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET

Item 1 – Draft Air Quality Strategy

One Member welcomed the strategy, but expressed his wish to see more statistics for infant and young people in the district. He hoped that these statistics would be included in future versions to support the strategy's development.

Item 2 – Housing Landlord Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy

One Member welcomed the detail of the strategy and hoped that liaison with town and parish councils would be built into its implementation.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Item 5 – Financial Monitoring Report

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, the Leader introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations, to approve

the reallocation of net residual pay award in support of preparations for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve the reallocation of the net residual 2024/25 Pay award contingency (£496,000) to create a new £150,000 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) reserve, with the remaining £346,000 being applied to the Council's existing Corporate Priority Reserve.

Item 6 – Adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:-

1. notes the outcomes of the public consultation that took place for 6 weeks on the proposed amendments to the SCI and agrees the draft responses to the representations received (set out in Appendix 2);
2. agrees the changes to the SCI set out in Appendix 1 and formally adopts the amended SCI document; and
3. that any final editorial changes to the document prior to publication be agreed by the Strategic Director of Place, Operations and Sustainability in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy.

Item 7 – Asset Maintenance and Replacement Programme and General Fund Capital Programme 2025/2026

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, the Leader introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr M Wade moved an amendment, to include a modest capital contribution of £60,000, as a contribution to the Hythe Ferry company, towards the repair costs of the pontoon. In support of the amendment, Cllr M Wade spoke of the Hythe Ferry as a heritage asset, its history and role as a key sustainable travel option in the district. Cllr Osborne seconded the amendment.

The Council's Section 151 Officer clarified that the amendment, if carried, would require external borrowing as part of the Council's Capital Strategy.

Members speaking for the amendment highlighted the vital travel service with strong links to key considerations in the Council's local plan preparations. The heritage of the site was reiterated. It was suggested that the Council's contribution could positively lead to matched funding from others.

Members speaking against the amendment, whilst supporting the ferry as a concept, including its heritage, raised concerns about funding the enterprise from the Council's own Capital Programme. It was suggested that grant funding, or community infrastructure levy might be more appropriate funding streams.

Concerns about the sustainability of the ferry service and the cost of effectively maintaining the pontoon and promenade were cited.

Some Members raised concerns of the lateness of the proposed amendment and potential spend of £60,000, welcoming further information from officers at a future date, outlining the implications in full, before considering such a proposal.

In responding to the debate on the amendment, Cllr M Wade highlighted the multimodal transport objectives of the Council that would be enhanced by supporting the ferry. He highlighted that the Hythe Ferry company was sensitive to the need to ensure future sustainability. The positive impact on tourism and businesses were reiterated.

In responding to the debate on the amendment, the Leader was concerned about the future viability of the ferry, and as a non statutory function, she was not supportive of using external borrowing to finance the ferry company through the Council's Capital Programme.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Members went on to debate the substantive motion further.

RESOLVED:

1. That the schedule of projects, as included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 be approved within the 2025/26 budget, noting that this commits the Council to expenditure beyond 2025/26 whereby a project commences in 2025/26 and extends into future years;
2. That the Vehicle and Plant replacement programme be approved for a 2-year period, covering purchases due in 2025/26 and 2026/27;
3. That the Appletree Court scheme previously approved in August 2024 be removed from the Capital Programme, updating the Council's MTFP accordingly and note the new £200,000 allocation for a reduced scope of work in the revised Capital Programme under recommendation 1; and
4. That the intention to create an Asset Management Strategy, be noted.

Item 8 – Capital Strategy 2025/2026

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, the Leader introduced the item and moved the recommendations from Cabinet. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

One Member welcomed the revised position in respect of Lymington Town Hall.

RESOLVED:

That the Capital Strategy 2025/26 be approved, including the adoption of the Minimum Revenue Payment (MRP) statement.

Item 9 – Scheme of Members’ Allowances – Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and Scheme to apply from 1 April 2025

The Leader introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the full recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and the scheme of Members’ Allowances to apply from 1 April 2025, be approved.

57 REPORT OF CABINET - 19 FEBRUARY 2025**PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no items resolved by Cabinet in this report.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**Item 1 – Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme 2025/26**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the item and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

The motion was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, Brand, Clark, Clarke, Cleary, Crisell, Cullen, J Davies, S Davies, Dowd, Dunning, Frampton, Glass, Harrison, Hartmann, Hawkins, Haywood, Linford, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Murray, Osborne, Penman, Penny, Poole, Rackham, Reid, Reilly, Richards, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, A Wade, M Wade, Ward, Woods and Young.

Voting against:- None.

Abstaining:- None.

The recommendations were carried, 42 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstaining.

RESOLVED:

1. That from 07 April 2025, an increase in dwelling rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;
2. That from 07 April 2025, an increase in garage rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level be agreed;
3. That from 07 April 2025, an increase in shared ownership property rents of 3.2% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines of RPI +0.5%, be agreed, and that the weekly rent of one additional property sold under previous legislation be increased by 2.7%;

4. That from 07 April 2025 Service Charges will continue to reflect actual charges and following a reduction in window cleaning and utility costs, these respective charges will be reduced;
5. That the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report, be agreed; and
6. That a Housing Capital Programme to 2027/28, as set out in Appendix 4 to the Cabinet report, be agreed.

Item 2 – Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget 2025/26

The Chairman used his discretion to allow the Leader of the Council and the leaders of the opposition groups only to exceed the time limit for speeches, for making their budget speeches. He highlighted his intention to attempt to facilitate one budget debate on the recommendations from Cabinet and any single alternative proposal, also at his discretion. However, should more than one amendment be tabled, he indicated that these would be dealt with one at a time, for clarity.

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and moved the recommendations as proposed in the report of the Cabinet dated 19 February 2025. She also made a statement on the budget, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group made a statement and moved an amendment in the form of an alternative budget. Cllr Clark seconded the amendment. A copy of the alternative budget had been circulated to all Members and published as part of the supplementary council agenda. A copy of the statement made is attached to these minutes.

The Council debated the Cabinet's budget proposals together with the alternative budget.

Cllr Armstrong moved an amendment, to the fees and charges for beach huts, to charge £185 for a transfer of a licence of a beach hut, on the death of the licence holder. In support of the amendment, Cllr Armstrong considered that the proposed charge within the report of £621.67 was extortionate. He highlighted that in respect of cemeteries, a fee of £185 was used in the event of the transfer of an Exclusive Right of Burial, and this was far more reasonable. Cllr J Davies seconded the amendment.

The Council's Section 151 Officer clarified that the impact of the amendment, although a new fee and therefore not straightforward, was likely to be in the region of £3-4k.

The amendment was put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Armstrong, Brand, Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Harrison, Haywood, Linford, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Rackham, Reilly, Richards, A Wade, M Wade and Woods.

Voting against:- Cllrs Alvey, Blunden, Clarke, Cleary, Crisell, S Davies, Dunning, Frampton, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Murray, Osborne, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Sleep, Tipp, Tungate and Young.

Abstaining:- Cllrs Dowd, Rickman, Thierry and Ward.

The amendment was lost, 17 in favour, 21 against, 4 abstaining.

The Council further debated the Cabinet's budget proposals together with the alternative budget, before voting on them.

The outcome of the recorded vote on the alternative budget was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Brand, Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Dowd, Harrison, Haywood, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, Rackham, Reilly, A Wade, M Wade and Woods.

Voting against:- Cllrs Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, Clarke, Cleary, Crisell, S Davies, Dunning, Frampton, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Linford, Murray, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate Ward and Young.

Abstaining:- Cllr Richards.

The alternative budget was lost, 16 in favour, 25 against, 1 abstaining.

The outcome of the recorded vote on the budget as outlined in the report of Cabinet, was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, Clarke, Cleary, Crisell, S Davies, Dunning, Frampton, Glass, Hartmann, Hawkins, Linford, Murray, Penman, Penny, Poole, Reid, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, Ward and Young.

Voting against:- Cllrs Brand, Clark, Cullen, J Davies, Dowd, Harrison, Haywood, Mballa, McCarthy, Millar, Osborne, A Wade, M Wade and Woods.

Abstaining:- Cllrs Rackham, Reilly and Richards.

The substantive motion and budget as presented in the report of Cabinet was carried, 25 in favour, 14 against, 3 abstaining.

RESOLVED:

1. The updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and financial strategy, as set out in the Cabinet report and throughout appendices 1-3, be approved;
2. there is a General Fund Net Budget Requirement in 2025/26 of £25.509 million, as set out in appendices 5a - 5d to the Cabinet report;
3. the New Forest District Council Band D Council Tax for 2025/26 shall be £205.77 (paragraph 24);
4. the General Fund Capital Programme for 2025/26 of £19.411 million, as set out in appendix 6 to the Cabinet report be approved;
5. the proposed fees and charges as included at appendix 7 to the Cabinet report be approved; and
6. the principal of utilising up to £1.377 million of the budget equalisation reserve to fund investment in community assets, supporting the future

transition to the new unitary authority and town and parish councils, is approved.

58 COUNCIL TAX 2025/26

The Council considered the Council Tax for 2025/26.

The Leader moved the recommendations in the report which had been updated and circulated with the supplementary council agenda, following a change in the precept request from New Milton Town Council. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

One Member highlighted the variety of town and parish councils across the District, and hoped that through any local government reorganisation process, that these towns and parishes, and their different needs and requirements would be supported.

The recommendations were put to a recorded vote, the outcome of which was as follows:-

Voting for:- Cllrs Alvey, Armstrong, Blunden, Brand, Clark, Clarke, Cleary, Crisell, Cullen, J Davies, S Davies, Dowd, Dunning, Frampton, Glass, Harrison, Hartmann, Hawkins, Haywood, Linford, McCarthy, Millar, Murray, Osborne, Penman, Penny, Poole, Rackham, Reid, Reilly, Richards, Rickman, Sleep, Thierry, Tipp, Tungate, A Wade, M Wade, Ward, Woods and Young.

Voting against:- None.

Abstaining:- Cllr Mballa.

The recommendations were carried, 41 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstaining.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations be approved.

59 QUESTIONS

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

- From Cllr Dunning to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on Hurst Spit.
- From Cllr Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on planning enforcement and building control.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on funding for HM Lord Lieutenancy.
- From Cllr Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on CIL under LGR.
- From Cllr Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the Solent Freeport.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on black bag deliveries.
- From Cllr McCarthy to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on asset transfers to Town and Parish Councils under LGR.

- From Cllr Osborne to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on funding for adult social care.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on development in north Totton.
- From Cllr Mballa to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the restrictions on disabled bus passes.
- From Cllr Richards to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the Climate Change Task and Finish Group and Strategy.
- From Cllr Cullen to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on Fawley waterside.

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

60 NOTICE OF MOTION - CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

In accordance with Standing Order 21, Cllr Rackham moved the following motion:-

“This Council resolves that:-

- 1. Only those Members who do not belong to the ruling political group shall be eligible for nomination to the positions of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the ordinary committees and panels of the Council; and*
- 2. The consequential amendment to the Council’s Standing Orders for Meetings be made by the Monitoring Officer.”*

Cllr J Davies seconded the motion.

In accordance with Standing Order 42, the Chairman reminded Members that the motion should stand referred to the body within whose terms of reference the subject matter of the motions comes.

In view of an upcoming report to the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the Council’s recent corporate peer challenge, the Chairman confirmed that the motion would be referred to the Panel meeting on 20 March 2025.

61 ALLOCATION OF SEATS AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND PANELS

Cllr Cleary introduced the report and moved the adoption of the recommendations. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:-

1. Having considered the allocation of seats to committees and panels in accordance with the principles set out in the report, agrees to the allocation set out in the table in Appendix 1; and
2. appoints councillors to individual committees and panels, as identified in Appendix 2, for the remainder of the four year period ending May 2027.

CHAIRMAN

Chairman, it takes a lot of time, thought and effort to produce a sound balanced budget that seeks to prioritise the funding we have available to the highest priority areas as outlined in the Council's adopted corporate plan.

There are also several hurdles along the way that we have to contend with. In December we found out that the provisional finance settlement for 2025/26 had reduced our expected level of government backed funding by nearly half a million pounds. Then of course the white paper released on December the sixteenth cast a shadow of uncertainty over the future of Local Government in England. In January through the final finance settlement, only then did we receive notice that the employer national insurance grant was only going to cover 25% of our forecast increased cost; another shortfall of around half a million pounds.

As a long-standing Conservative administration however, we are well versed in these challenges, and because of our prudent and sensible approach to financial management, we are able to weather these storms, and still produce a balanced budget that continues to invest in the services that we deliver for our residents.

Lets be clear, it is no mean feat to produce a balanced budget that includes an additional two point three million pounds within the revenue budget, and eight million pounds within the capital programme to deliver a new, modern waste service. A new service that will encourage households to produce less waste, and recycle more. This significant level of investment, on top of the eight million pounds spent over the last 14 months on our fantastic new depot facility in Hardley, shoring up our ability to provide a vital front facing service for several years to come.

The recent corporate peer challenge that was undertaken at the Council gave us really helpful feedback that our corporate plan was well prepared with an ambitious vision, and well communicated. It did however also recommend that we reflect on capacity and prioritise clearly. We need to be sensible about what we can realistically achieve and deliver in the space of a financial year and medium-term budget cycle.

I therefore have three main priorities to deliver over the next financial year; Council transformation, the delivery of the new waste service, and the investment in community based assets.

The budget continues to prioritise investment in our Council wide transformation programme, despite it being unlikely that we'll have the time to see through the delivery of all the savings initially targeted

through the original business case. We are very much full steam ahead in terms of still seeking to deliver modern digital platforms that will improve our residents and customers ability to self-serve, and more easily transact with the Council at a time that suits them.

The significant upgrade to our waste collection service, including for the first time the separate collection of food waste is the single largest whole system change that we will have seen at this Council for decades. The budget provides the necessary funding required to roll-out our new waste service, which will be a truly mammoth undertaking over the next twelve months.

I have also reflected on the position that the devolution White paper leaves us with. It would be financially irresponsible of us to not think ahead to how we can best support the new local authority that will continue to serve the New Forest residents. I have therefore set aside some funding to invest in specific and necessary local government reorganisation resource, and have prioritised one point four million pounds of residual funding we have available from our budget equalisation reserve to enable investment in our community assets. The programme will require important discussions with Town and Parish councils to secure local services at a local level.

Of course there are several other matters that continue within our budget plans, aligned to the Corporate Plan; the budget includes the additional forty thousand pounds I pledged last year to increase the amount that this Council can put into the community grants programme. Thanks to the cross-party work of the task and finish group and overview and scrutiny panel, we have awarded grants in the 2025/26 financial year totalling three hundred and twenty three thousand pounds, including an increase to individual councillor grants from six hundred pounds to one thousand pounds. I implore all councillors in this chamber to utilise this funding to maximum effect, and support the initiatives and projects in your respective areas that have the widest reach to your constituents.

The budget also includes in excess of eleven million pounds over the next three years on CIL funded project delivery. Projects will result in improvements to our town centres, coastal destinations, open spaces, community halls, sports halls, footpaths and highways across the district. This is another commitment from the Conservative administration to ensure our new forest community see the direct benefit from developer funded CIL contributions.

Our Housing budget for 2025/26 allows for over thirteen and a half million pounds of maintenance expenditure to our 5,250 properties; an increase of two point eight million in comparison to 2024/25. We are accelerating our maintenance programme over the next few years to the significant benefit of our tenants. These programmes will continue to improve energy efficiency, and further improve the quality of the homes we provide through enhanced kitchen, bathroom, doors, windows and boiler replacement programmes. In addition, we have set aside budget of over forty five million pounds to spend on new homes over the next 3 years. If we could deliver more, then trust me, we would, but we have to be realistic about the availability of local housing supply, and be sensible about the number of opportunities we can take forward within the next 3 years considering the Local Government Reorganisation framework.

I won't shy away from having to make sure our housing rents track inflation, and that our fees and charges remain carefully benchmarked and reflective of increased service delivery costs. This is why I endorse the range of increases as set out within the budget report.

As an administration, we have proposed an increase to the New Forest District Council precept of five pounds and ninety eight pence for the year. A precept amount which often gets lost amongst the overall bill which of course includes the council tax precept from the County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire Rescue service, and the local town and parish council. We can only control our part, and I think to do all that we do for a band D council tax for the year of two hundred and five pounds and seventy seven pence I believe represents excellent value.

The fully-funded and balanced Housing Revenue Account and General Fund Budgets both remain ambitious, but are achievable. They are well thought through and considered, and enable us to prioritise what we can reasonably deliver on areas that will make the biggest impact to the largest number of our residents.

My special thanks go to our wonderful staff at the Council who continue to provide such excellent services, and to my Cabinet colleagues for their work and input into this difficult and challenging budget process.

Chairman, I fully endorse the recommendations as laid out in the report of the Cabinet.

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Members we stand at the threshold of the most pivotal change in local governance in our lifetimes. The transition to a unitary authority is not just an administrative change, it is a fundamental shift in how we deliver services, allocate resources, and define the priorities that will shape our communities for years to come. This is not about party politics; this is about leadership, vision, responsibility and accountability to the people we serve. The decisions we make now will echo into the future, and we cannot afford for their sakes to let this moment pass without action. The Conservative administration has been cautious with finances, and while fiscal prudence is important, there is a difference between being cautious and being unprepared. When we move into unitary governance, decisions will be made about priorities and services for the New Forest area, which will no longer be made in this chamber and debated by its members. If we do not act now to set the agenda for investment in our district, we risk being overlooked when resources are redistributed across a much larger population. The new authority will not inherit just our budgets, it will inherit our priorities. We must make those priorities clear now for the residents of our district.

We can work to make the transition to unitary government an opportunity if we use it wisely. The councils that take the lead in setting up pilot programs, proving feasibility, and demonstrating community impact will be the ones that shape the policies of the new authority. If we do nothing, our local priorities risk being lost. But if we lead now, our district can be at the forefront of shaping the policies and investments of the unitary government from day one.

This is the focus in our budget, to improve wellbeing across the district, support local businesses and help those that need assistance. We want to encourage green initiatives and enhance our communities' environments.

Liberal Democrats want to support local businesses more. We propose NFDC refocusing its commercial strategy to promote multi-purpose units in our main settlements with facilities including superfast broadband, office space at a reasonable rent and extended business rate relief to encourage the purchase and use of empty shops. Economic resilience is not something that happens by accident, it is the result of planning, innovation, and forward-thinking policy. NFDC to allocate resources to produce a Digital Economy Strategy for the district so we can benefit from the business and art opportunities it would bring to our area.

Encourage Green Energy production with Business rate relief incentives. Ensure the New Forest is ready to compete in this new environment. Let us not forget Tourism is a corner stone of the district's local economy we

propose looking at innovative ways to support tourism like a self-funding Tourist App high lighting the many tourist venues and experiences in our area.

The economic landscape of the New Forest is changing, and with the shift to a unitary authority, we must ensure that there is access to digital infrastructure, flexible workspaces. Delivering a level of support to promote current and future growth.

We want to improve access to art and culture in our communities to help wellbeing by creating Arts Hub/Creative spaces and include a transient art and culture hub such as an arts bus, to move around the district. In addition, formalising the Arts Advocate scheme to have a representative in each community with local arts and performance venue representation.

We have an aging population with 29.8% over the age of 65, many of which are much older and need to be able to get to health centres if they cannot drive but we have no practical public transport links to Lymington or Southampton hospitals .So we propose working in partnership with Towns and Parish Council to provide a "health bus service" to Lymington/Southampton hospitals. NFDC to provide the seed capital of £50k to purchase the first bus and work with local councils to produce sustainable revenue costs plan to be funded by T&P's councils thereafter.

We want to help our youth too supporting them develop into the citizens of the New Forest of tomorrow, by setting up Youth Hubs, engaging with HCC and other partners to provide funding for more youth and family hubs, focusing on school holidays, with meal and activity funding throughout District.

In the 23/24 figures, amongst our New Forest school age children there are 20.4% on free school meals compared to 19.4% across the county and 19.7% across the Southeast region. These figures equate to 4250 children being in poverty. This has risen by 224 children since I brought this to the council's attention last year and the Conservative administration did not respond. Since 2021 the number of children in poverty in our district has grown by 802, We can still make a difference and prevent further growth in child poverty because the Liberal Democrats propose NFDC working with other agencies such as HCC,CAB, the Food Foundation The Handy Trust and other local charities providing a grant contribution of £500,000 aimed at stopping the increase and reducing child poverty in the New Forest District (£250k over two years).

Strong communities are built on stability. When families struggle with poverty, when young people lack opportunities, and when older residents cannot access health services, the cost is not just social, it is economic. These pressures translate into increased demand for services, lower workforce participation, and a reduced quality of life that affects everyone. Our proposals are more than just supporting the vulnerable; they are about making smart, proactive investments that reduce long-term costs and create a more resilient, self-sufficient community.

In the last election we reduced our number of councillors from 60 to 48 saving allowances, expenses and community grant funding. Hampshire County Council has its own councillor community grant scheme on hold pending a review. So many local organisations will lose out on this vital source of funding, so we propose an enhanced budget for NFDC Councillor community grants to be raised to £1200 per member.

Housing and Homelessness issues should not be as high as they are in our district, with a large number of New Forest families on the Housing waiting list. Therefore, Liberal Democrats propose to raise the Housing acquisition budget. to £50m over 3 years, from the administrations £45m per year.

We have only to watch the news to see the impact of climate change getting worse. We never want to see New Forest residents becoming the victims of nature. We need to continue to act for future generations of New Forest residents. We propose a feasibility study into turning sections of NFDC car parks into covered solar panelled parking bays to generate electricity for charging electric vehicles selling the excess power to subsidise carparking costs. Another step by this council of cost-effective green actions towards a more economically sustainable environmental future.

Many of our areas suffer from fly tipping and whilst the campaign by the Liberal Democrats to save the Hampshire County Council Recycling Centres drew cross party support to keep them open. We need to plan for the future, the outcomes of the local government organisation is unclear. We need measures to protect our communities from increased fly tipping and a strategy to deal with side waste, the excess waste, which will not go in the wheelie bin. Therefore we propose having Community skips in our main communities as have been successfully introduced in other councils for excess waste, side waste and a legal alternative to fly tipping.

The Liberal Democrats are committed to democracy and listening to our residents not just through surveys, but by engagement to really hear

what they want us to do. Our district, the geographically largest in the county, contains diverse communities, where one size solutions do not fit it all. We propose following the successful introduction across the country in many local authorities the setting up of Citizen Assemblies, asking participants to look at 3 key topics each year, all relevant to the New Forest District and the communities we serve.

None of our proposals negatively impacts the council's finances or the medium-term financial plan. To reassure members on the financial aspects of this budget they will be paid for using £1.079m of the revenue budget, which was going to be transferred into the Capital Budget. In the officer's report it states, "The level of additional borrowing required to backfill the capital programme financing would not be at a level that would likely cause a significant detrimental short-, medium- or long-term effect." It is also worth remembering over the last 8 years every year but one have had significant underspends along with sums of extra money from the government/interest rates improvements etc, in the last budget outturn 23/24 the unbudgeted income amounted to £3.52m. Our Capital spend of that year was a final spend of £8 million from a 15 then 13 million spend plan leaving £4.693 million rephased into future years man and savings of £1, 029 million. So financially we are able to make these improvements.

We as councillors are elected not only to represent our residents but to work to improve their quality of life and to make our district a great and safe place to live, work and visit.

The challenge we face is bigger than any one council, any one budget, or any one political party. We are making decisions today that will shape future of governance of the New Forest. If we do not act now, if we do not set clear priorities, secure funding, and establish a framework for the new authority then those decisions will be made for us, without us. We choose to lead by putting together a budget that helps fortify our district for the governance challenges ahead and improve things for New Forest Residents.

Council – 24 February 2025 – Questions Under Standing Order 22

Question 1

From Cllr Barry Dunning to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Can the PH for Environment and Sustainability please update members on any impacts of the January 2025 storms to Hurst Spit and of any plans for NFDC to undertake any necessary maintenance works.

Reply:

Our coastline was affected by two named storms towards the end of January. The 27th January storm was slow moving and sustained Hurst Spit and other coastal areas to a prolonged period of damaging waves.

Once conditions allowed, post-storm inspections and surveys were undertaken by our coastal team who I would thank for their immense efforts over the last month.

Initial inspections show that a length of approximately 400m of Hurst Spit was damaged, with a general reduction in crest width from around 12m, down to 1m in the most affected sections. This means that there is no longer vehicle access for operational purposes for those managing Hurst Castle.

With regard to undertaking any works to repair the Spit I can confirm that NFDC has no plans to currently undertake any works to restore Hurst Spit to its condition prior to the storm impacts.

NFDC has no land ownership responsibility for Hurst Spit, or any operational responsibility. Land ownership for the main body of the spit is shared across a number of organisations and private individuals.

The current position on not undertaking maintenance and repair work is due to the funding constraints of there being no external funding to support any works. Due to the limited property flood risk there is no available funding through the flood and coastal erosion risk management route of grant in aid. Along with this, those organisations and stakeholders that own or have an operational interest in Hurst Spit have declined to provide any supporting funding to enable works to take place.

It should also be noted that even if funding became available that assent would be required from Natural England to enable any works progression. And I would add that there is no legal duty on NFDC to undertake flood and coastal erosion risk management activities at Hurst Spit or for any other areas of the New Forest coastline. The powers to act are purely permissive.

There has been no change to NFDC's policy on managing Hurst Spit and undertaking associated maintenance works. We will continue to do so if the following applies:

- Funding is available either through central government grant or contributions to support required works; and*
- Works are required to protect against flood and erosion risk. Note - NFDC will not undertake works to enable vehicle or pedestrian access along the Spit; and*
- Appropriate assents and licences are in place to enable works to progress, including Natural England assent (to work within a site of special scientific interest, (SSSI)).*

Should the member wish to further understand the past management of Hurst Spit I would suggest a review of the recent PH decision paper.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on a lack of funding, the Portfolio Holder agreed to attend a meeting of a campaign group called 'Save Lymington and Keyhaven' to understand ongoing concerns. In the meantime, the Portfolio Holder would be writing to the Secretary of State to express his concerns over the lack of funding.

Question 2

From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

During the Planning Committee in January, it became apparent that building regulations visits and enforcement are not being carried out as effectively as they should. Please can you let us know how many Enforcement Officers and Building Reg Inspectors did we have six months ago, how many do we have now and is this enough for NFDC to be effective?

Reply:

The Planning Enforcement team consists of three enforcement officers and one team leader. The Building Control team consists of six inspectors,

three trainees and a team leader. There have been no changes in personnel over the last six months and both teams are fully staffed. Both services are subject to significant regulation and the Building Control service is currently the subject of a planned audit by the Building Safety Regulator.

I do believe that we give a good, effective service with existing staffing levels. It is important to realise that not every construction site in the New Forest uses our Building Control service, with there being a significant private sector presence for many sites. With privately employed inspectors providing a competing service.

There have been recent occasions where development sites have initially used privately employed inspectors who, have then ceased trading whilst the development is being constructed. On such occasions, the application reverts back to the local authority's building control service, who will take swift action to assess the works on site and ensure that subsequent construction meets the relevant regulations and standards required, including consultation with other bodies where required.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on what influence the Council has on third party building control, the Portfolio Holder stated that ultimately, private businesses should uphold the required standards and the Council could only intervene when concerns were discovered. He offered to arrange a meeting with Cllr Brand and a senior officer to discuss the matter further.

Question 3

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary

I hope the Leader was as shocked as I was when it was revealed that, despite being on the verge of bankruptcy, Hampshire County Council still pays for the King's official representative in Hampshire – the Lord Lieutenant – to the tune of £130,000 a year. Does the Leader agree with me that the King should pay for his own Lord-Lieutenant, not the hard-up taxpayers of Hampshire?

Reply:

I believe that the value of the Lord-Lieutenant is well recognised as part of our historic civic arrangements across the county. I understand that every aspect of the county council budget has been looked at rigorously

through the budget-setting process and as such it is not for me to comment on the future funding for this role.

Note – in response to a supplementary question which invited the Leader to write to HM the King on this matter, she declined to do so, highlighting that this was for Hampshire County Council to consider.

Question 4

From Cllr David Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

With unitary authorities due to be established in the next couple of years, and with them the end of New Forest District Council as a legal entity, what reassurance can we give our residents that the funds this council has received under the Community Infrastructure Levy – totalling many millions of pounds – will be spent in the New Forest, for the benefit of New Forest residents, once the spending decision passes to another authority?

Reply:

As you have already heard tonight, the Leader of this Council has already reiterated our commitment to ensure that the interests of our communities are placed at the heart of discussions about future local government reorganisation. Until we hear otherwise, this Council will continue to lead our communities in delivering high quality services across its areas of responsibilities, including the collection and expenditure of the Community Infrastructure Levy. The framework for allocating the expenditure of these funds is well established through an Expenditure Framework which was last revised in October 2024 by this Council. As outlined in the Leader's speech tonight, the proposed capital programme budget for 2025/26 - 2027/28 includes Developer Contributions (£106) and CIL funded projects of over £11 million. Further work will be undertaken next year to ensure the Council continues to facilitate the delivery of projects using the funding it collects for this purpose.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the timing for passing on funding through local government reorganisation, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that it was too early to foresee any potential timing of reorganisation and therefore it would be unfair to speculate on this issue.

Question 5

From Cllr Mark Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary

The Leader of this Council has been an outspoken advocate for Freeports, championing their widely touted economic benefits. However, at the recent Waterside Vision event, the CEO of the Freeports acknowledged that any tangible gains may not materialize for another 25 years—another case of economic transformation forever on the horizon, yet to be realized.

Meanwhile, the gravitational pull of the Freeports threatens to accelerate the fragmentation of the New Forest's existing structure, drawing the Waterside ever closer to Southampton's economic and political sphere. Given that devolutionary shifts may see these assets siphoned away, can she outline the concrete mechanisms she has secured to ensure that any future prosperity remains within the New Forest?

Reply:

I have to say, I am disappointed that the tone of the contributions from the opposition is sinking so low, and I really hope you reflect on the impact some may feel from your wording.

I was pleased that Cllr Clark and a number of other councillors present here today were able to attend the recent Waterside Vision event. An event where a number of landowners, key businesses and voluntary and community representatives came together to receive updates on the progress being made on work across the Waterside and to discuss how we can continue to work collaboratively to maximise the potential of the Waterside in the best interests of our communities.

Clearly, Cllr Clark and I have a very different recollection of the event and indeed what the purpose of our work on the Waterside, and the designation of the Freeport is trying to achieve. To state that the CEO of the Freeport company warned, that any tangible gains might not arise on the waterside within the next 25 years is plainly false. Indeed, we know that there are key projects already being delivered at Solent Gateway in Marchwood and through the FAST project at Exxon Mobil.

That's not to belie the challenges ahead as we seek to bring forward the wider opportunities across the Waterside and the associated economic, social and environmental benefits that it can bring. Members will recall that the key priorities of this Council were agreed in April of last year

across a series of themes ranging from transport/wider infrastructure, Employment and Skills, Prosperous Communities and Environmental Sustainability and the development of a Local Delivery Plan. Work is now underway to develop these themes into a clear proposition within the New Forest Freeport Delivery Plan which will be subject to Member scrutiny and consideration in due course.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the concerns over securing the future benefits in the New Forest area, the Leader stated that she did not agree with the councillor's view on this issue.

Question 6

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

In the past couple of months I have had more queries on bin bag deliveries than almost any other issue. Can the Portfolio Holder reassure Residents living in Totton and the Waterside, who are in Phase 3 of the change over to Wheelie Bins, and therefore will be using bin bags for 12 months, that any remaining deliveries of black and recycling bags are delivered on time, any delays are communicated much clearer, and resilience plans are in place to reduce impact on our residents?

Reply:

I am pleased to say that sack deliveries are currently running according to schedule.

In the last quarter of 2024, higher than usual staff sickness led to the service making a choice between delivering sacks and running core waste collections. Of course we prioritised the collection of waste and recycling from our residents, and this led to some delays in getting sacks out to residents in some areas. As soon as available, additional resources were deployed to clear the backlog of deliveries, and this situation has now been recovered, with deliveries being back on schedule.

This information was available to residents on our website, specifically on the sack deliveries webpage, and the Customer Service Team were provided with a brief to manage queries from our residents. The resource and cost associated with the delivery of sacks is one of the reasons why this Council is modernising its services in 2025 and 2026 via the rollout of wheeled bins and a new food waste recycling service, which will also significantly improve our recycling performance.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the information made available to the customer service team, the Portfolio Holder felt that the team handled these issues well and provided accurate information to residents.

Question 7

From Cllr Colm McCarthy to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

As this lame duck administration limps rapidly towards its own demise, by what criteria will assets be handed over to Town and Parish Councils for their continued management and what is the time scale?

Reply:

Firstly Cllr McCarthy, we are not a lame duck, and we are not going to limp anywhere. We have always been a strong council, and we will continue to be a strong council until the last day of existence in our current form.

In terms of your question, officers are currently in the process of drafting an asset strategy, which will reflect the Local Government Reorganisation context. That document, which I am expecting to see finalised later in the Spring, will set out a policy position to include the appropriate process that we will follow to determine which assets may suit transferring and / or may suit alternative management going forwards. That formalised process will consider the appropriate assessment criteria and will set out a likely timescale for this as a significant project. We will also need to take steps to set up the appropriate channels for dialogue with our Town and Parish Councils and potentially the broader community sector. This all needs setting out in a structured way, and resourcing effectively to ensure we achieve the best outcome for our residents. Our commitment of £1.4 m in the budget to support this process is a clear sign that we intend to deliver on this as a priority action whilst we still exist as New Forest District Council.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on the approach to Town and Parish Councils on these matters, the Leader confirmed it would be a consultative process.

Question 8

From Cllr Stephanie Osborne to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

It's no secret the New Forest has one of the largest elderly populations of anywhere in the country. This puts us in a weak position during local government reorganisation because nobody wants to fund the cost of providing social care in the New Forest.

The truth of the matter is that social care shouldn't be a postcode lottery. Instead of being funded through council tax, it should be funded by central taxation. Does the Leader agree? If so, will she write to Government calling for social care to be funded through central government taxation, not through local council tax?

Reply:

The Government states that local government reorganisation is designed to create simpler more sustainable councils. Within this the demographics of the New Forest is only one aspect for consideration. We believe our communities, our businesses and our council will be a strong contributor to any future unitary council.

With the Commission on Adult Social Care reform chaired by Dame Louise Casey just launched I do not think it is sensible to jump to a conclusion as to the correct solution, and I will therefore not be writing to the government on this matter, which is outside our current remit.

Note – in response to a supplementary question on securing good social care in the New Forest through local government reorganisation, the Leader felt that this was a matter for new unitary authorities to consider.

Question 9

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

Some years ago in Totton we were given the assurance that there would be a structured plan of the development in North Totton, across the entire site. Those plans seem to have dissipated as development has taken place in a piecemeal way so I wonder what assurances there may be that plans for future developments will be enforced?

Reply:

Cllr Rackham is correct that in allocating land for development at North Totton (Policy SS1 of the adopted Local Plan) there was a recognised objective for the different landowners to come together and prepare a comprehensive development framework for the entire allocation. This was identified in order to ensure delivery of an integrated, whole site, approach to the provision of routes across it, the mix of uses and facilities and spread of green space. However, since the adoption of the Local Plan it has not been possible to bring the landowners together to secure such a development framework for the comprehensive development of the entire site.

The absence of such a framework cannot preclude the duty that the Council, in its role as Local Planning Authority (LPA), has to determine planning applications made to it based on the overall merits of the proposal.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing as it fell outside the 30 minute time limit at the meeting.

Question 10

From Cllr Patrick Mballa to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

Does the Leader agree with me that restrictions on disabled bus passes introduced by her fellow Conservatives on Hampshire County Council will have a disproportionate impact on people in the New Forest because of our rural nature?

Reply:

Whilst I would prefer County Councillors not to have to make any decision that has a negative impact to any resident of the New Forest, I do understand that the financial challenges faced by Hampshire county council have led to some very difficult decisions having to be taken.

In terms of this particular decision, I have to trust that the County Council have carried out an appropriate equality impact assessment, and I'm sure will not have taken the decision lightly. I would encourage any resident who has been adversely impacted to contact their county councillor, who can make the appropriate representation at the County Council.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing as it fell outside the 30 minute time limit at the meeting.

Question 11

From Cllr Janet Richards to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

In response to a motion originally put to this Council on 13th May last year, regarding measurement of the Council's carbon emissions, the Council agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider this.

The Climate Change and Nature Emergency Annual Update report approved by Cabinet on 2nd October clarified that a Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy was currently being drafted and would be informed by the Task and Finish Group which would explore the issues over a 12-month period, starting in Autumn 2024.

Since the Task and Finish Group is yet to be set up, please could you tell me the reason for the delay and clarify the latest timescale for the commencement of the Task and Finish Group and for the completion of the Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy?

Reply:

Given the breadth of scope and complex nature of the subject matter, careful consideration has been given to the format and content of both the Task and Finish Group sessions and the background information, to ensure that Members are well informed and able to maximise the value of the group discussions.

Consultation on key issues and opportunities has been undertaken at an officer level, and a draft climate change adaptation report has been created to provide a clear understanding of the expected impacts and key hazards for the New Forest District, helping to inform future priorities. This report will be discussed at the next Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 13th March.

These extensive preparations have taken more time than initially envisaged; however I feel that the sessions will be better as a result. Can I ask that colleagues with an interest in sitting on this Task and Finish Group make themselves aware to Democratic Services when volunteers are shortly invited, so that we can commence as soon as possible after the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing as it fell outside the 30 minute time limit at the meeting.

Question 12

From Cllr Sean Cullen to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

Retrospective permission has been given to use the important Fawley site for storage and not for housing for approximately a year. Can NFDC guarantee that this is only a temporary measure and that the site will return to housing use as previously stated?

Reply:

As Cllr Cullen will be aware, there are currently three temporary planning consents for a variety of commercial activities within the Fawley Waterside site. Whether applications are made to extend these temporary planning consents beyond their current time limits is ultimately for the landowners to decide and this Council will consider any such applications on their merits.

Whilst the site is allocated in the current Local Plan for a residential led-development, it has never been used for housing and the viability challenges of delivering housing on this site are well known. The landowners of the site are beginning to undertake work to identify a new, longer term future for the site, alongside the preparation of our Local Plan Review. My officers will continue to proactively engage with landowners in this work, engaging with local communities as appropriate.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing as it fell outside of the 30 minute time limit at the meeting.

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