

**20 MARCH 2025**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a Special meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Thursday,  
20 March 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, Alan Bethune, Tanya Coulter, Daniel Reynafarje and Matt Wisdom

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Cullen, Dowd, Frampton, Haywood, Linford, Rackham, Richards and Thierry.

**62 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that she had granted a dispensation to all Members of the Council to speak and vote on the report and recommendations at minute 63 below, in respect of local government reorganisation. This was because it could be argued that Members could have a disclosable pecuniary interest in potential local government reorganisation, by virtue of their receipt of a Members' allowance as a Member of New Forest District Council.

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

### **63 DEVOLUTION UPDATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION INTERIM PLAN**

The Chairman confirmed that he had called the meeting to meet the deadline set by the Government for the submission of an interim plan for local government reorganisation proposals for Hampshire and the Solent.

The recommendations were in two parts. Part one dealt with an update on Devolution and the Council's response to the Government consultation, which was for Council to determine. Part two outlined recommendations that Cabinet would consider at its Special Meeting on 21 March 2025. Council, through the course of debate and in passing any specific resolutions, was asked to advise the Cabinet in respect of those recommendations.

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

In moving the recommendations, the Leader referred to the work undertaken by all political groups across the Council and thanked Members for their collaboration. She expressed that despite it not being the Council's priority to pursue local government reorganisation, it was imperative to ensure that work with all councils in Hampshire was collaborative, to secure the very best advantage to continue to make a difference for the good, not only for the New Forest but for the Council's staff and all residents.

Taking Members through the report, she also thanked the Chief Executive and senior officers for their work to date and concluded by reiterating her top priority was to secure the best future for the unique and special place of the New Forest.

The Chairman referred to the advance notice of a number of amendments and proposals and confirmed that he would ask the Council to consider these each in turn first as amendments, in order to then move on to the substantive debate on local government reorganisation.

#### Amendment 1

Cllr Brand moved an amendment to recommendation 1(b), to read "that the Council delegates authority to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with all Political Group Leaders to respond to the Government consultation on the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority." Cllr Woods seconded the amendment.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

#### Amendment 2

Cllr Armstrong moved a proposal which read "It is the Council's view that, Cabinet recommendation 2(b) should be amended as follows:- Delegate authority to the Leader of the Council , in consultation with all Political Group Leaders to approve the final interim submission on behalf of the Council, in the event that minor amendments are agreed by the 15 councils." Cllr J Davies seconded the amendment.

Put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

### Amendment 3

Cllr M Wade moved a proposal which read “It is the Council’s view that, Cabinet recommendations 2(c) should be amended as follows:- Cabinet consider key points of importance in the development of a final proposal that reflects the unique geography, history, economy and communities of the New Forest.” Cllr Cleary seconded the amendment.

Put to the vote, the proposal was carried.

### Amendment 4

Cllr J Davies moved a proposal which read “It is the Council’s view that, Cabinet recommendation 2(e) should be amended as follows:- Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and with all Political Group Leaders, to access and spend funds from the Council’s Devolution and LGR Reserve.” Cllr McCarthy seconded the proposal.

Put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

The Council went on to debate the substantive motion and advise the Cabinet of its views, which included the following key points:-

- Members did not feel that Local government reorganisation would benefit the residents of the New Forest and outlined that representations had been made to them from residents about the loss of the council and a fear of losing local services.
- Concerns were raised that instead of focusing on the delivery of services to New Forest residents, Council time and resources would be diverted into reorganisation.
- There was total opposition to any proposal which split the New Forest community through boundary changes.
- There was a concern that if the waterside area was subsumed into a ‘Greater Southampton’, the remainder of the New Forest had not been considered.
- There was consensus across the Council that Members should work together to develop proposals urgently, that work across Hampshire and the Solent, and that keep the New Forest together.
- Members referred to the New Forest’s unique market town and village economy, which was noted as being rural in its nature. This included a coherent historic identity, focused on the forest. This was not considered to be compatible with an urban economic geography.
- Concerns were raised that by splitting the New Forest waterside away from the remaining district, both parts of the district would be disadvantaged.
- Members referenced the unique partnership arrangements in the New Forest including the National Park Authority, Verderers Court, Commoners, and the 37 Town and Parish Councils that form the building blocks of the local New Forest communities. It was noted that areas that do not have Town and Parish Councils have very different community governance arrangements that may not align with the New Forest.

- The long term funding of adult social care was of concern to Members, including the viability of future unitary councils and the fact that district and borough councils have an excellent track record in delivering statutory and community based services, that serve the needs of residents at a local level.
- The point was made that reorganisation would not resolve the funding challenges faced by authorities with responsibility for adults and children's services.

The Chairman, and the Leader thanked Members for their contributions to the debate which would guide the Cabinet's consideration of the matter.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Council:-

- a) notes the Government's decision to include Hampshire and the Solent on its Devolution Priority Programme, leading to the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority in May 2026; and
- b) Delegates authority to the Leader of the Council to respond to the Government consultation on the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority, on behalf of the Council.

2. It is the Council's view that:-

- a) Cabinet recommendation 2(c) should be amended as follows:-  
Cabinet consider key points of importance in the development of a final proposal that reflects the unique geography, history, economy and communities of the New Forest.

**CHAIRMAN**