

14 APRIL 2025

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 14 April 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:**

Alan Bethune, Lee Ellis, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje, Karen Wardle and Matt Wisdom

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs England, Parker, Thierry and Woods.

**64 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 24 February and 20 March 2025, be confirmed.

**65 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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

**66 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reported on the following recent engagements:

**Chairman's Civic Service**

The Chairman was delighted to report that on 23 March, he had held his Civic Service at St Mary Magdalene Church, New Milton. This highlighted key elements of his time over the year as Chairman, and it was acknowledged that the 50<sup>th</sup> year of New Forest District Council was drawing to a close. The event had been attended by civic heads, the Chief Executive, the Leader and other councillors and the Chairman thanked all those who attended.

**Opening of Hardley Depot**

On 24 March, the Chairman attended the grand opening of Hardley Depot which provided larger and modernised facilities. The depot was a base for local services, including waste and recycling collections and street cleaning.

**New Milton Community Celebration event**

The Chairman attended an event in New Milton to celebrate members of the public and their support within the local community.

**Milford on Sea Community Library**

The Chairman attended a celebration event to mark the 10 year anniversary of the community library. He acknowledged the importance of libraries and the benefits they brought to the local community.

**Civic Days**

The Chairman had also attended a number of civic days, including that for the Mayor of Winchester and the Chairman of East Hants. The Vice-Chairman, Cllr John Sleep also attended the Civic Day for the Mayor of Havant and the Chairman of Hart.

**Vice-Chairman attended event – Annual Duke of Edinburgh Award Evening**

The Chairman thanked the Vice-Chairman, for attending the annual Duke of Edinburgh award presentation evening, where certificates were presented by Lieutenant Colonel D J Love, adventurer and mountaineer.

**67 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS****Waste Collection Service Roll out**

The Leader reported that an important milestone in the journey to improve recycling across the district had been met, as work had begun delivering wheeled bins and

food waste caddies to the 30,000 households in Phase 1 of the rollout. This was the first visible step towards the start of the new waste collection service in June, a service that had been a long time in the planning and was eagerly awaited by many of our residents.

Not only would the new service help increase recycling rates, it would also bring immediate environmental benefits, such as cutting down on the mess and hazards caused by animals tearing into sacks, by introducing the new weekly food waste recycling which would take the food waste out of the general waste.

The Leader acknowledged that any big change would take time to get used to. She recognised that it would be an adjustment for both residents and crews, who would be working to entirely new routes and schedules. A great deal of effort had been put into clear, helpful communication, from leaflets and letters to online information, to make sure residents know of the changes, when they would take place, and how to make the most of the new service.

Finally, she thanked residents for embracing this change, and the staff from the crews on the ground to those behind the scenes, for all their hard work in bringing this ambitious project to life.

#### **Local Government Review Update**

The Leader expressed her thanks to members of the Council as a whole for making it very clear what the council's position was on future local government reorganisation, and for supporting Cabinet to take the decision to submit the interim response to Government. Feedback was awaited, but in the meantime hard work was taking place to build alliances to support the preferred outcome, and also to defend the District from any boundary changes that were felt to be not necessary or justified.

#### **68 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW**

Cllr Alvey introduced the report and moved the recommendations. Cllr Adams seconded the motion.

##### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the updated Financial Regulations, as set out in the report and in appendices 1-3, be approved; and
2. That the consequential changes to align the Contract Standing Orders (CSO) thresholds as set out in appendix 4 be approved.

#### **69 REPORT OF CABINET - 21 MARCH 2025**

There were no speakers on the item considered by Cabinet on 21 March 2025.

**70 REPORT OF CABINET - 2 APRIL 2025****PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 2 April 2025.

**PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL****Item 6 – People Strategy**

Cllr Cleary introduced the item and moved the recommendation from the Cabinet meeting held on 2 April 2025. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A few members recognised that with the prospect of Local Government Review (LGR) that it was an uncertain and challenging time for members of staff. The importance of staff was highlighted, and it was felt that support needed to be in place to manage any insecurities and to provide development opportunities for all staff for the future in an uncertain time.

Cllr Cleary acknowledged and supported the concerns raised.

**RESOLVED:**

That the People Strategy be adopted.

**Item 7 – Digital Strategy 2025-2028**

Cllr Heron introduced the report and moved the recommendation. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A member spoke in support of the strategy but raised concern about members of the public who could not, or would not engage by digital means. This view was supported by other members who spoke about the District having an ageing population and that people should be supported by offering alternative ways to contact and engage with the council. It was highlighted by one member that councillors had a role to play in the community, as that there were various organisations, such as the mens shed, for example, which got people together and this could be used as an opportunity to educate people, recognising that digital skills were important for everyone. It was suggested that this could be done through the provision of a member grant, or through members attending meetings and that this would help the health and wellbeing of the community.

One Member expressed their thanks to the changes which had been made to the Digital Strategy following the discussion at the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Cllr Heron responded, acknowledging the points raised and reported that the council would continue to be accessible to residents through the information offices which provide face to face contact, as well as on the telephone, as alternatives to online digital services for as long current administration remained in place.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Digital Strategy 2025-2028 be adopted.

**Item 8 – Corporate Peer Challenge report and action plan****Part I – Recommendations resolved by Cabinet**

One Member spoke in support of the Corporate Peer Challenge report and felt that all the recommendations should be implemented.

**Part II – Recommendation to Council**

Cllr Cleary, introduced the report and recommendation for Council approval, relating to the motion which had been considered by the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel and by Cabinet. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr Rackham proposed an amendment to recommendation 4. This had been published with the agenda prior to the meeting and is detailed as follows:

*That the process for selecting the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Panels only, be amended to support the principle that these six positions are allocated to the political groups on the Council, in proportion to their overall membership of the Council. At present, this would mean an allocation of:-*

*Conservative Group – 3 positions*

*Liberal Democrat Group – 2 positions*

*Independent Group – 1 position*

*If the Council supports this principle, draft amendments to the Council's Standing Orders for Meetings would be made to establish a procedure, for consideration at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2025.*

Cllr Rackham spoke in support of the amendment, highlighting the purpose of scrutiny, to act as a critical friend and the importance of this in the democratic process. It would enable more sound consideration of scrutiny topics. The peer review had suggested that scrutiny meetings could be chaired by the opposition. The amendment did not propose to alter the political composition of the panels. There was nothing to fear and everything to gain in terms of more equal discussion. Finally, the suggested approach was practiced in some other authorities.

Cllr M Wade seconded the amendment.

A member spoke in opposition to the amendment expressing the view that it was less democratic, as it limited who you could vote for to be chairman and vice-chairman.

A number of members spoke in support of the amendment. It was suggested that the best person to be chairman of the panels was not necessarily from the leading party and that other members were capable of chairing meetings. There was merit in an alternative view being expressed by the opposition and that it would allow greater debate, more challenge and that opposition chairman would enable greater involvement of members and improve working between all parties. A member spoke about scrutiny not being about following party political lines.

It was acknowledged that the peer review report had suggested that the panel meetings could be chaired by an opposition member as a means to strengthen scrutiny. The motion from Cllr Rackham had been discussed by the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel and that a motion to support the peer challenge recommendation on scrutiny being chaired by opposition members was narrowly defeated by one vote. A member responded to this, acknowledging that there had been a detailed debate at the panel meeting, and the voting demonstrated that the debate had been fairly equal and that the matter had been fully scrutinised.

A member spoke in opposition to the amendment, highlighting that the constitution allowed for any member of the panel to be elected as chairman and vice-chairman and that the proposal would divide up the panels along party political lines.

A member highlighted that the proposed amendment followed the approach taken in the House of Commons, whereby the role of chairman of select committees was shared across the political groups.

Cllr Rackham, in her summing up clarified that the amendment presented at the meeting was not her original motion. The proposal would enable more challenge and examination for the benefit of local residents. The amendment had been put forward, in light of the recommendation contained within the peer review report.

Cllr Cleary responded to the debate reporting that the scrutiny panels allowed for all members to be involved, and that challenge by the opposition was not feared. She felt that close working had been taking place with opposition members and that whilst the peer review had recommended there be consideration of opposition chairman, it was not something she was supportive of.

Put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council, having considered the views of the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet, with regard to the motion that the process for selecting Chairmen and Vice-Chairman of Committees and Panels, agree that the process should remain unchanged.

**Item 9 – Principal Risk and Risk Management Policy update**

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

One Member raised an issue which had previously been raised at the Cabinet meeting in relation to page 10 of the Risk Management Policy, and the morale section where it was felt that the first box should be fuller in content.

Cllr Cleary responded to this and clarified that this point had been taken on board.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Principal Risk Register and revised Risk Management Policy be adopted.

**71 NOMINATIONS TO THE OFFICES OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman invited Members to propose and second the nominations for the offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council received in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Cllr Hawkins moved that Cllr Sleep be the Council's nomination for the office of Chairman of the Council for 2025/26. Cllr Poole seconded the motion.

Cllr M Wade moved that Cllr M Clark be the Council's nomination for the office of Chairman of the Council for 2025/26. Cllr J Davies seconded the motion.

Members debated the nominations.

Put to a secret ballot, Cllr Sleep received the majority of votes.

Cllr Sleep moved that Cllr Penny be the Council's nomination for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2025/26. Cllr Poole seconded the motion.

Cllr Miller moved that Cllr A Wade be the Council's nomination for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2025/26. Cllr Cullen seconded the motion.

Members debated the nominations.

Put to a secret ballot, Cllr Penny received the majority of votes.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council's Nominations for the Offices of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2025/26, be as follows:-

Chairman – Cllr Sleep

Vice-Chairman – Cllr Penny

**72 QUESTIONS**

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

- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the use of profit from the car parks to fund other transport services.
- From Cllr A Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr S Davies, regarding the Landlord Forum and challenges to find suitable private sector housing.
- From Cllr J Davies, to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on LGR and timescale for notification of the geographical boundaries of the new unitary authorities.

- From Cllr M Clark, to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the District Councils contribution towards consultants with regard to LGR discussions.
- From Cllr Brand to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the assessment of any reorganisation and access to services for local residents.
- From Cllr McCarthy to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on officers and councillors involved in dual discussions with other authorities and conflict of interest.
- From Cllr Mballa to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary on contingency plans and the alignment of the reorganisation plan being developed at county level.
- From Cllr Harrison to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the publication of all correspondence with DLUHC and other authorities.

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

**73 APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER**

**RESOLVED:**

1. That Matt Wisdom (currently Service Manager – Democratic and Support Services) be appointed as Monitoring Officer (under a new role: Assistant Director – Strategy & Engagement), with the Monitoring Officer function taking effect from the departure date of the current Monitoring Officer, Tanya Coulter;
2. That the consequential amendments be made throughout the Council's Constitution; and
3. That Council notes the decision of the Chief Executive (as the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer) to appoint the Strategic Director, Corporate Resource & Transformation to undertake the roles of Deputy Returning Officer and Deputy Electoral Registration Officer.

**74 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

There were no changes.

CHAIRMAN

## **Council – 14 April 2025 – Questions Under Standing Order 22**

### **First Questions**

#### **Question 1**

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

It is clear that HCC will not contribute to a decent public transport system for our residents. We have a broken ferry service, still no buses direct to the General Hospital and residents across the Forest completely limited in where they can work by a lack of buses. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me exactly why profit from the car parks – which is over a £1 million a year – cannot be used to fund a community health bus, a Calshot bus service and to relaunch the Hythe Ferry?

*Reply:*

*The money generated by the Councils car parks is already accounted for, both covering their operational costs as well as supporting the delivery of a raft of other Council services and operations as part of our balanced budget. I can't help but wonder which of the current services offered by this Council, and so valued by our residents, the Councillor would propose we stop funding or delivering to meet her request? Perhaps it's quite timely that the next question on this agenda item is focused around homelessness, and the recognition of rising costs here; this just one area of many that the Council supports through its balanced budget.*

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding whether any funding could be used from other sources, such as CIL for community transport, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that there was a procedure to be followed for the allocation of CIL funding with an application process and a review of bids received being considered at a member Task and Finish Group. CIL funding had a clear defined use for what it can be used for.

#### **Question 2**

#### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Steve Davies**

With Housing and Homelessness cases being an issue that all Ward Cllrs will be dealing with, and the challenges with Housing Families in the Private Sector, due to rising costs among other factors, what can he share

with Cllrs from the recent Landlords forum that could reassure those Families in finding a suitable home which our Housing Officers are supporting, and reduce those having to use emergency accommodation?

*Reply:*

*Thank you for your question. The private rented sector landlords provide a valued and essential supply of homes across the district. Whilst homelessness wasn't discussed at the last forum, at the forum information is shared with landlords to reassurance and support them on areas of shared interest.*

*A Homelessness Prevention Officer is employed by the council, whose role is dedicated to identifying properties, agents and landlords in the private rented sector; liaising with them to build a good working relationship to ensure a good supply of properties to prevent homelessness.*

*A Homelessness Prevention Support Worker Officer is also employed to liaise with the individual at risk or the landlords to provide a degree of assurance there, to offer sustainable support for anyone at risk of being homeless.*

*We also have emergency temporary accommodation which we try to avoid, using it for emergency use only. There were temporary accommodation sites, in the District, thought to be 196 in total. 57 units had been created since 2018. These were a holding place for those who had been made homeless. More units were becoming available with 17 more this year, of which 6 were in New Milton, 8 Totton (Salisbury Road), and 3 elsewhere in the district.*

*It was anticipated that 10-12 more homes would be available in Ringwood and Fordingbridge shortly. It was important to try to avoid any emergency accommodation need by ensuring that more accommodation is available.*

Note: In response to a supplementary question about reducing the number of people on the housing waiting list, particularly in the light of LGR and whether more should be done to provide additional temporary accommodation, the Portfolio Holder recognised that it was a challenging situation with no simple answer, but acknowledged that more could be done. He felt that the duty at the current time was to consider ways to support local residents. Around 49% of prevention funding was spent on homelessness, which was a general fund expense. The provision of additional temporary accommodation would reduce these costs.

### **Question 3**

#### **From Cllr Jack Davies to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

Following this Council's support for the joint submission to government, when will Councillors be told the geographical boundaries of the new unitary authorities?

*Reply:*

*The government's timetable for local government reorganisation is not fixed beyond the deadline of final proposals to be submitted in September 2025.*

*I believe that the priority ahead remains to protect the distinct identity of the New Forest by looking to form a rural unitary council with mid-Hampshire, preserving the whole of the New Forest District.*

*Having only recently secured all of the necessary data, KPMG consultants are now modelling a set of options that will be discussed by the leaders of the 15 councils in early May and I will update all Members when I am able to, as I have done throughout this process.*

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding any Government organisation plan which included the New Forest District merging with Southampton, either in full or in part and whether the Leader would formally oppose this and take legal steps to challenge it, the Leader would have to consider if there was any appropriate recourse to challenge any government decision, in the event that an outcome was forced on the Council that was not supported by the community. She would however, work as hard as she could to keep the District as one whole unit and that it was her top priority.

### **Question 4**

#### **From Cllr Mark Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

In regards to LGR discussions, how much is the contribution that this authority is making towards consultants either jointly with others or severally to achieve its' aims of keeping the New Forest together?

*Reply:*

*This Council made a decision to allocate £150,000 into a specific Devolution and LGR reserve. Some of this funding will be needed to contribute towards the jointly commissioned work with KPMG, and we may decide to spend some of this funding on our own commissioned work with consultants. As of yet, neither of these values are confirmed. I have vowed to keep all Councillors informed of our plans and intentions, and this will include the sums committed to spend, when committed to.*

Note: In response to a supplementary question about whether the appointment of consultants had gone through procurement processes considering value for money or competitive tendering, the Leader reported that due to the technical nature of the question she would provide a response outside of the meeting.

## **Question 5**

### **From Cllr Hilary Brand to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

The Conservative HCC Administration in Winchester chose to fast track the LGR process pulling in Districts such as our own to the momentum. Pausing for a moment, what assessment has this Council made of how reorganisation might affect local access to services, especially for rural and elderly residents?

*Reply:*

*I would not want to comment on the County Council's apparent enthusiasm for devolution and local government reorganisation. What I do know is clear is that reorganisation alone will not produce the scale of savings that are required to provide financially sustainable services over the medium term.*

*We strongly believe that the right model for new services delivering adult and children's services is one that is designed around our deep understanding of place. This, alongside our statutory and community based preventative work with local partners will ensure that resources can be allocated more efficiently and meets the needs of our communities.*

## **Question 6**

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

We have a number of double hatters or even triple here in this chamber. Are any Officers or Councillors on this Council involved in dual discussions with other authorities that may create conflicts of interest in shaping our position?

*Reply:*

*Currently I am leading on the discussions with the other leaders. As the process develops there will be a need for more input from other members across the council and there will be particular points at which decisions will need to be made. All councillors involved in the debates and decisions from all parties will have to be aware of any conflicts of interest they may have, for example those sitting on the District Council and the County Council will need to decide what approach they are going to take to the decisions within each council.*

*Officers of the council will be acting further to the direction agreed by members, and I cannot see a position arising where an officer would have a conflict of interest. Officers are aware of their need to consider conflicts generally in the work that they do for the Council.*

## **Question 7**

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

What contingency plans exist if the political leadership of this Council is clearly not aligned with the reorganisation plan being developed at county level?

*Reply:*

*At present the council is working in line with the agreed principles which includes modelling a range of different options. As has been made clear it is unlikely that we will all as 15 councils settle on one option.*

*With council support we are working to deliver a rural-focused unitary authority as the best option for the New Forest area, and one that does not see the district divided. If this is not supported as a model by other councils, we will then consider whether to make our own representations.*

## Question 8

### **From Cllr David Harrison to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary**

We have only seen vague expressions of intent by the leadership on our website. Wouldn't it be useful for public debate by publishing further information? Will the Council therefore commit to publishing all correspondence with DLUHC or other authorities on this matter in the interests of transparency?

*Reply:*

*I agree that transparency in the process is very important. Initial correspondence with council leaders from MHCLG has been in the public domain and linked to on our website and in the background papers of our decision making report in March.*

*Data sharing and access to information as local government reorganisation progresses, is something that is being taken up collectively by the leaders and chief executives across Hampshire and the Solent, so that we have a consistent approach across all councils. This will involve the publication of information pro-actively where appropriate, and the protocol for how councils respond to any requests for specific information.*

Note: In response to a supplementary question about the unwanted possibility of District Council merging with Southampton and the level of confidence the Leader had to be able to stop it, the Leader reported that she would actively talk with other Leaders as well as Chief Executives to give it her best effort. She was passionate about the forest, recognising it was a unique place and that it should be protected.