

12 MAY 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 12 May 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, James Carpenter, Tanya Coulter, Sara Hamilton, Sue Jennings, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje, Andy Rogers, Joe Tyler, Karen Wardle and Amanda Wilson

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Adams, Rackham, Reid, Thierry and Woods.

1 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2025, be confirmed.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

3 VOTE OF THANKS TO THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

The Leader of the Council proposed that a vote of thanks be extended to the outgoing Chairman, Cllr Hawkins, for the admirable way in which he had carried out the duties of Chairman during the past municipal year. Cllr Sleep seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the thanks of this Council be extended to Cllr Hawkins for the admirable way in which he had carried out the duties of Chairman during the past municipal year.

4 OUTGOING CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the officers who had supported him over the last year, in particular, Sue Jennings, Business Support Officer (Democratic and Chairman). He asked the members join him in giving her a round of applause for the fantastic job she had done in supporting him.

The Chairman thanked the Vice-Chairman, John Sleep for stepping in to represent the District Council at any events he could not attend. Finally, thanks was expressed to members of the council and the Chief Executive for helping him over his year as chairman.

5 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr Hawkins moved that Cllr Sleep be elected Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. Cllr Cleary seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Sleep be elected Chairman of the Council for the 2025/26 municipal year, until his successor is elected at the Annual Council meeting in May 2026.

Cllr Sleep signed the declaration of acceptance of office, which was formally witnessed by the Monitoring Officer. He was then invested with the Chain and the Badge of Office before taking the chair.

6 ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL

The Chairman addressed the meeting and thanked Cllr Hawkins for his sterling commitment in representing the District Council and that it had been a pleasure to support him through his year. He was honoured to be given the opportunity to stand before members in the year ahead.

The Chairman highlighted that the future was uncertain regarding the future representation of the forest communities in the proposed devolution plan. He referred to the council being extremely healthy, thriving and democratically sound, with a healthy opposition and that members should be united in ensuring the community had a voice at the table. The ongoing efforts of the Leader and Senior

Officers were acknowledged, to ensure the New Forest was represented at the table in any discussions.

The Chairman recognised that some Councillors were more vocal than others in their representation and that in the weeks ahead there would be some healthy debate, to leave no stone unturned, in making sure that all aspects were covered of where the future leads. He would do his best to allow all who represent their wards, the opportunity to have their voice, and on that basis, members could reassure residents that they had done their utmost to present a strong argument for maximum representation.

Finally, the Chairman looked forward to representing the council, and with the support of his wife and Consort, Denise, they would take great pride in undertaking this honour and were very much looking forward to the year in office. The chosen charities the Chairman would be supporting were Solent Mind and Youth and Families Matter.

7 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Cllr Sleep moved that Cllr Penny be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. The motion was seconded by Cllr Cleary.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Penny be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council for the 2025/26 municipal year, until his successor is appointed at the Annual Council meeting in May 2026.

Cllr Penny signed the declaration of acceptable of office, which was formally witnessed by the Monitoring Officer. He was then invested with the Badge of Office.

Cllr Penny returned thanks for his appointment.

8 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

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

RESOLVED:

That Council approved the amendments to the Constitution, as set out in the report and attached appendices.

9 ALLOCATION OF SEATS AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND PANELS

The Leader moved the adoption of the recommendations in the report, to approve the allocation of seats on committees and panels to the political groups where the political balance rules apply, and to appoint councillors to those committees and panels. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- a) Agreed the allocation of seats to committees and panels in accordance with the principles set out in the report, and in doing so, agreed to the allocation set out in the table in Appendix 1; and
- b) Appointed councillors to individual committees and panels, as identified in Appendix 2, for the remainder of the four year period ending May 2027.

10 NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chairman announced that in accordance with Standing Order 42.2, that he would allow the motion to be dealt with at the meeting, as he considered it to be convenient to the despatch of business.

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

This Council notes:

1. Democratic Accountability in Hampshire: *The current devolution process in Hampshire must prioritise democratic governance and accountability to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of Hampshire residents.*

2. The high cost of standing: *The mayoral elections in England require a £5,000 deposit and a £5,000 contribution for inclusion in a candidate booklet, which deters capable individuals from running for office. While it is essential to discourage frivolous candidacies – the cost should be lowered and alternative mechanisms considered, such as requiring candidates to gather a specified number of signatures from electors.*

3. Voting System Change: *Until 2023, mayoral elections in England were conducted under the Supplementary Vote system, which provided a fairer voting mechanism compared to the First Past the Post system now in use.*

This Council believes that:

1. Lowering financial barriers *would encourage greater participation and diversity among candidates, enhancing democracy.*

2. Reintroducing a fairer voting system, *using Supplementary Vote (or a similarly fairer voting system) would ensure a more representative and democratic outcome.*

This Council resolves to:

1. Call for the cost of standing for election to be lowered *by reducing deposit requirements and introducing alternative mechanisms, such as requiring a specified number of signatures from electors, to discourage frivolous candidacies.*

2. Support the reintroduction of a fairer voting system *such as the Supplementary Vote, for mayoral elections in England.*

3. Request formal support from:

- *The Leader of Hampshire County Council*
- *The Minister for Communities, Housing, and Local Government (MCHLG)*
- *The local MPs (“New Forest West” and “New Forest East” constituencies)*

Invite the Leader of the Council to write to the above recipients, unless the Leader does not support the motion, then instead invite the Chief Executive Officer. The letter to state the council's position regarding recommendations one and two (above) and seeking their support for these reforms.

4. Promote these reforms during the devolution process in our interactions with Hampshire County Council, the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government and other relevant stakeholders.

Cllr Parker reported that the motion sought to strengthen the foundations of local democracy in the New Forest and across Hampshire. The motion proposed some practical common sense changes to ensure that as powers shifted and evolved, local democracy would remain firmly rooted, fair, accessible for all and transparent. He felt that local democracy should be shaped by residents and that their diverse voices be represented. A healthy democracy should offer the ability for a diverse range of capable individuals to stand for public office irrespective of their financial position. It was highlighted that the substantial upfront cost was a financial barrier towards standing in the mayoral elections which were significantly higher, potentially 20 times higher than the cost of stand as an MP.

The requirement for a deposit and the booklet fees further amplified the initial financial hurdle, which make it difficult for individuals to consider standing, without significant funding or party political backing. Cllr Parker urged members to endorse the motion as a positive and necessary step towards strengthening local democracy.

Cllr M Wade seconded the motion.

Cllr Cleary proposed an amendment to the motion, which removed the references to the voting system, specifically that:

1. Under **This council notes**: that point 3. be removed
2. Under **This council believes** that: that point 2. be removed
3. Under **This council resolves to**: that point 2. be removed

Cllr S Davies seconded the amendment.

A number of members thanked Cllr Parker for bringing the motion forward for consideration and debate.

Members speaking for the amendment supported the first past the post method voting system on the basis it was simpler, quicker, and more representative and democratic in its outcome, recognising that people voted for the candidate they wanted to be elected. The use of the word “fairer” was contested in relation to an alternative voting system to that of first past the post.

Members speaking against the amendment considered the first past the post system to be less fair and that alternative voting systems enabled every vote to count. It was suggested that alternative voting systems were more likely to lead to

smaller parties or individuals being elected, recognising that the results of the most recent local elections reflected that politics was becoming more fragmented. It was highlighted that the current voting system, often meant that the successful candidate was elected with only a small proportion of the electorate voting for them. It was felt that the current voting system was broken and that public confidence was low, which was demonstrated by the poor turnout rates. A change to the system would help to restore trust in democracy. Furthermore, it was pointed out that alternative voting systems to first past the post were used successfully in other countries.

One member highlighted that proposing any change to the voting system at this stage was unlikely to change the direction of travel, given the intention to bring in the mayoral system in May the following year and with this in mind, it was felt that the amendment should be supported. It was acknowledged that members could however influence the costs associated with candidates standing in any mayoral election.

Put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Members went onto debate the substantive motion. Members supported the call to lower the cost of standing for election which would encourage more candidates to stand.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes:

1. *Democratic Accountability in Hampshire:* *The current devolution process in Hampshire must prioritise democratic governance and accountability to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of Hampshire residents.*

2. *The high cost of standing:* *The mayoral elections in England require a £5,000 deposit and a £5,000 contribution for inclusion in a candidate booklet, which deters capable individuals from running for office. While it is essential to discourage frivolous candidacies – the cost should be lowered and alternative mechanisms considered, such as requiring candidates to gather a specified number of signatures from electors.*

This Council believes that:

1. *Lowering financial barriers* *would encourage greater participation and diversity among candidates, enhancing democracy.*

This Council resolves to:

1. *Call for the cost of standing for election to be lowered* *by reducing deposit requirements and introducing alternative mechanisms, such as requiring a specified number of signatures from electors, to discourage frivolous candidacies.*

2. *Request formal support from:*

- *The Leader of Hampshire County Council*
- *The Minister for Communities, Housing, and Local Government (MCHLG)*

- *The local MPs (“New Forest West” and “New Forest East” constituencies)*

Invite the Leader of the Council to write to the above recipients, unless the Leader does not support the motion, then instead invite the Chief Executive Officer. The letter to state the council's position regarding recommendations one and two (above) and seeking their support for these reforms.

3. Promote these reforms during the devolution process in our interactions with Hampshire County Council, the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government and other relevant stakeholders.

11 **ATTENDANCE DISPENSATION UNDER SECTION 85 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Cllr Cleary moved the motion set out on the Council agenda which recommended that the legal requirement be waived, in relation to Cllr Thierry on the grounds of ill health, to prevent him being automatically disqualified as a councillor not attending council meetings for a period of six consecutive months from the date of his last attendance. This was until 18 May 2026.

Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

Cllr J Davies proposed an amendment to the motion to reduce the timeframe for Cllr Thierry's attendance to the Full Council meeting on 15 December 2025. Cllr Haywood seconded the amendment.

Cllr J Davies spoke to the amendment recognising that it was a very difficult situation and that a balance needed to be struck between providing support to Cllr Thierry to recover but also ensuing local residents were represented in his ward. Cllr J Davies felt that a dispensation for one year was too long, and that any member who could not attend a meeting for a prolonged period of time should consider stepping down in order to allow someone else to be elected.

A number of members across the Council wished Cllr Thierry well in his recovery. It was highlighted and accepted by members that Cllr Thierry had been conducting case work for his local constituents, sometimes from his hospital bed and therefore his ability to carry out case work was not in question.

Members who spoke in support of the amendment, felt that a dispensation for a shorter period of time would allow the situation to be reviewed earlier and that local residents deserved to have their ward member participating in meetings in order to represent them. It was highlighted that the rule in relation to attendance had been put in place to ensure accountability and to protect the integrity of local democracy. It was highlighted that a similar approach to Cllr Thierry's meeting attendance had not been taken by Hampshire County Council. It was felt that a precedent would be set if a timely limit on attendance was not set.

Members who spoke in objection to the amendment reported that Cllr Thierry continued to be active in the local community and in his role as a ward councillor. The ability for him to attend meetings was difficult due to his mobility and his ability to drive. Cllr Thierry was a long standing member on the District Council and it was felt he deserved to have a dispensation for one year, to allow his health to improve. This was a practical solution which would remove the administrative burden of reviewing it should a shorter time period be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Before voting on the substantive motion, a councillor requested that the best wishes of the Council for a speedy recovery be passed onto Cllr Thierry.

RESOLVED:

That having regard to the current ill health of Cllr Thierry, and in accordance with Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972, the requirement for Cllr Thierry to attend any meeting of the authority, be waived until the Council's Annual Meeting on 18 May 2026.

For the avoidance of doubt, the next meeting that Cllr Thierry must attend to satisfy the requirements of the legislation, in the event that he is unable to attend a meeting prior, is the Council's Annual Meeting on 18 May 2026.

12 MEETING DATES

The Council noted the following meeting dates for the remainder of the 2025/26 municipal year, all commencing at 6.30 pm:-

- 14 July 2025
- 15 September 2025
- 13 October 2025
- 15 December 2025
- 23 February 2026
- 13 April 2026
- 18 May 2026 (Annual Meeting)

CHAIRMAN