

Council – 14 July 2025 – Questions Under Standing Order 22

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Adam Parker to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

On the 'donkeys raiding bins' issue that made the national press: in parts of Scotland, residents have their bins under lock and key due to tourists seeing fit to dump their waste (usually in the incorrect type of bin). We've already had cases of this happening in Brockenhurst. Were lockable bins considered as part of the initial evaluation of this project? Can they be added to bins retrospectively? If the answer is no, why weren't they considered in what is a £5.6M scheme? And the common sense solution to what's been happening in Brockenhurst is surely to disregard the 'one size fits all' policy - and let people leave their bins behind their gates and fences if they're at risk of donkeys. So, can we make that policy?

REPLY

Thank you for your question regarding the supply of lockable bins to our residents.

The council is implementing its collection policy as based on previous engagement and consultation, including with stakeholders such as the Verderers and Forestry England, and since the inception of the Waste Strategy by this Council in 2021.

Due to the nature of our collection system and the number of properties in areas accessible to free roaming animals, the use of lockable bins, even if only adding a minute to each individual collection, would add an excessive amount of total time to each round. Substantial changes, would increase the cost of the collection and require additional staff and vehicles to complete the collection rounds.

We are however continuing to monitor the animal strikes on bins and caddies and have set up a form for residents to report any incidents, and we will consider if any changes to our operation are needed.

At present, we know that the scale of this issue is still small, but to deter animals, we ask residents to ensure that the food waste caddy is presented with the handle in the locked position, and that no food is added to the general waste bin.

We will continue to engage with residents, commoners and verderers on initiatives to reduce animals accessing waste.

I'm sure you will agree our new bins are an improvement against the plastic sacks which were so easily ripped open by animals.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding how much longer the disruption would continue the Portfolio Holder referred to the recent open letter that had been sent to all residents outlining the position that the Council was in at the moment.

Question 2

From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Since the start of June, I have been inundated with hundreds of queries from residents about missed waste collections, new bins not being delivered, and animals getting into the new food waste caddies. I know that our customer services staff have also been inundated.

Could the Portfolio Holder please provide the following information: How many people have used the form for reporting missed bin collections since June 9th? How many have reported a missed collection over the phone and how many have reported a missed collection by emailing the Waste Changes or Customer Services email address?

Reply

In the first 4 weeks of the new service, there were 2,606 missed collections of the new wheeled bins and food waste caddies reported to NFDC by residents. With 31,000 households in the phase 1 area, there were 248,000 collections due in the first 4 weeks, meaning that the number of reports received equates to just 1% of scheduled collections. In the first 4 weeks we have successfully collected over 150 tonnes of food waste.

This administration is investing in a new service with modern vehicles, ICT systems, new and improved working practices and more efficient routes. This huge level of vital change will result in some disruption to a small proportion of residents, which we are working hard to address. I do understand this disruption is frustrating to those affected and for that my apologies. There are things we will learn from as we move forwards to phases 2 and 3.

Do not judge this service rollout on this disruption in the early days of the scheme, judge it on the positive outcomes we expected when this waste strategy was approved, which we are now seeing - reducing waste sent to incineration, reducing the carbon impact of waste disposal, increasing our recycling rate, improving the range of materials we collect from residents, complying with government legislation on food waste, improving working conditions for our staff, reducing litter spilling from sacks on collection day, and many, many other benefits that will deliver us a modern, fit-for-purpose service.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding whether the Council will start offering refunds on Council Tax for the properties affected by missed bin collections, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that would not happen and requested that the context of the numbers in relation to mixed bins against the overall service that is provided and has not been disrupted.

Question 3

From Cllr Colm McCarthy to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

How many complaints have been made by Residents regarding the rollout of the new waste collection system?

Reply

We fully expected there to be some initial issues in the first weeks and months of service change. We didn't shy away from that fact in our briefings or communications in the lead up to service change, and as all members will be aware, we are delivering what can quite reasonably be described as, as the best part of thirty years worth of change to our first phase residents in the last six weeks, in line with our new collection policy.

For anyone still unclear what that involves... it is moving from weekly to fortnightly collections, it is about adding new crews on updated vehicles and technology, it is about delivering revised and more efficient routings and introducing food waste services. It is change that is complex, and affects all households involved, and which comes with a high level of expectation.

Talking of expectation, many of the issues we have had raised are as expected, and various predicted issues have come to fruition. This includes the uncovering of residential properties disposing of trade waste, or in some excessive cases 20-30 bags at a time, we have uncovered holiday accommodation operations that require trade collections not residential collections, we have seen a spike in the amount of trade related waste deposited at our bring sites, and various efforts at presenting side waste that will not be collected.

We continue to work with residents to ensure their waste is presented as required, provide support those who need access to our accessible collection service, advise those who are actually required to engage private waste services, and those who have an evidenced need for additional, or in some cases reduced capacity.

We deal with most contact through our contact centre, or most directly our online forms to report missed collections and the like.

Across all of the various contact channels, the Corporate Complaints team has only recorded 26 stage 1 corporate complaints relating to the service change up until Friday of last week, with all other matters being dealt with at an operational service level.

Personally, I would like to place on record my thanks to all of our operational teams, and the council staff working tirelessly in the background to iron out the kinks and issues, deal with matters as they arise and continue to deliver waste collection services for the absolute vast majority of our residents, and 88,000 households without issue.

Note: In response to a supplementary question whether a full review of the Phase One rollout, led by Councillors be conducted before the next rollout to Phases 2 and 3 to prevent errors and it was confirmed by the Portfolio Holder that this was ongoing and we made note of any improvements which were needed.

Question 4

From Cllr David Millar to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Ahead of the phase 2 roll out of wheelie bins, what changes are the Council considering to reduce complaints by residents, minimise pressure on our front line staff, and improve communication between the implementation team and the ward councillors?

Reply

Thank you for your question, I appreciate that you are a phase two Councillor and will be keen to benefit from the experience of those of us in phase one. For this kind of major service change a comprehensive lessons learned review of our phase one rollout was always part of our programme to enable us to apply any necessary actions or learnings to ensure the best possible outcomes for our residents in all 3 phased areas.

With regards to specific communication between officers and ward councillors, at the end of December and at the end of January, and again in April, all councillors were invited to either face-to-face or Teams briefings to set out the approach to the rollout. Recordings of these sessions are available on the Councillors areas of Forestnet.

Direct email communication was sent to all Cllrs just ahead of the service change, which included comprehensive information. This included copies of our leaflets, key links and information to help signpost and answer resident questions, and officers have continued to be available to support member queries.

We anticipate offering the same support to Councillors for phases two and three, and also plan to offer a specific area on Forestnet where information will be updated, we are also keen to hear any feedback on how Members feel they can be best supported.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding whether the review would involve Councillors from across the parties, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that it was essential that all Members had input into any feedback.

Question 5

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

In regards to our LGR consultation - Option 1 would merge the New Forest with three other districts, creating a vast and varied authority. Our district has unique and costly service demands, from coastal protection to managing the impacts of tourism on a world-renowned National Park. Can the leadership provide a detailed, evidence-based financial model that proves New Forest residents will not be forced to cross-subsidise services in other parts of this new council? Furthermore, how can you guarantee that our specialised, locally-attuned services will not be diluted or centralised under a 'one-size-fits-all' model, leading to a decline in service quality for our residents?

Reply:

Thank you for your question, which rightly highlights the unique and complex service demands of the New Forest – ranging from coastal protection to the stewardship of protected landscapes such as our National Park.

Option 1, which proposes a rural-focused unitary authority, is built on the principle of place-based service delivery. This means services can be designed around the specific needs of our communities, not imposed from a distant, urban-centric centre. We are actively resisting any model that would dilute our locally-attuned services or force the New Forest into a structure that does not reflect our identity, geography, or priorities.

This administration will not support any reorganisation that risks turning the New Forest into a peripheral outpost of a larger, urban-led authority. Our commitment is to a model that protects our environment, respects our communities, and delivers services that are tailored, not templated.

Finally, let me be clear, financial modelling is not an after thought in this process, it is a fundamental element. Our officers, in collaboration with partners across Hampshire and the Solent, are developing robust, evidence-based financial models to ensure that any proposed structure is both sustainable and equitable. These financial models will be an integral part of the proposal that we will submit to the government in September.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding SEND provision, Adult social care and the Council subsidising higher need areas, elsewhere, the Leader assured the Council that this would not be absent for the

proposals and that the Council was working with an experienced Director of Adults and Children's Services to advise our work.

Question 6

From Cllr Philip Dowd to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

NFDC's LGR proposal would create one of the largest unitary authorities in the country by area, stretching from the Solent to the North Wessex Downs. Such a super-sized council risks creating a significant democratic deficit, where decisions are made by a remote administration that is out of touch with our local communities. What specific and robust mechanisms will be embedded in the constitution of this new authority to ensure the voices of our towns and villages, from Totton and the Waterside to Ringwood and Fordingbridge, are not drowned out? How will you defend this proposal against the charge that it fundamentally weakens local democracy and erodes the distinct identity of the New Forest?

Reply:

Thank you for your question. The preservation of local democracy and the distinct identity of the New Forest is at the heart of our approach to Local Government Reorganisation.

We fully recognise the risks of creating a geographically large authority. That's why our preferred option is not simply about size, it's about structure, service design, representation, and accountability. The model we are advocating for is rooted in strong representation from our existing network of active Town and Parish Councils, ensuring that local voices continue to shape local outcomes. Something we share with Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire.

Further to our priorities, the Government has made it clear that effective neighbourhood governance is a key part of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill will set the landscape for all local authorities to establish effective neighbourhood governance. It means that there is a debate for us to take forward on how we create the space for a new unitary authority's towns, villages, and communities to have a stronger voice in shaping local decisions.

As for the New Forest's distinctiveness, the Bill and the LGR process both emphasise place-based governance. This means that any new authority must reflect and respect the unique character of its communities. The

Government will expect any reorganisation proposal to demonstrate how it will preserve local identity, ensure democratic accountability, and deliver better outcomes for residents and we believe that Option 1 gives us the best chance of doing that.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding our chosen model's unique selling point in achieving conflicting demands, the Leader confirmed that we did not support LGR but were making the best we can and our USP was local, responsiveness and would work day and night to make sure that happens.

Question 7

From Cllr Steph Osborne to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Fly tipping is increasing in local roads which are not seen as the responsibility of NFDC to collect. This leads to further fly tipping and is almost impossible for the residents to solve when it cannot be disposed of at the local recycling centres.

Would it be possible for NFDC to produce a leaflet to help residents deal with the fly tipping issues they face on what is deemed private land and cannot be disposed of at the tip? What advice or signposting regarding how to prevent further fly tipping in these areas can NFDC support our Residents with?

Reply

Fly tipping is a known problem within the district and something that both our Streetscene and Enforcement Teams work extremely hard to manage.

NFDC responds to, removes and investigates fly tipping on our own land as quickly as possible to reduce the environmental and visual impact of waste, however the clearance of material or waste disposed of on privately owned land is the responsibility of the landowner or persons in control.

Officers from the Environmental Enforcement team seek opportunities to work with landowners and to identify perpetrators or persons responsible and where identified, proceed with enforcement action. The organisation

of waste collection and the associated costs are the responsibility of the landowner. Following the transition of environmental enforcement services to the Service Manager for Community Safety, CCTV and Support Services, we are considering opportunities for providing further advice to residents and businesses in areas of fly-tipping and will consider your suggestion.

Information can also be found on the council's website.

Note: In response to a supplementary question would it be possible to arrange a suspension of recycling centres fees for residents who are trying to clear their area of fly tipping, the Portfolio Holder wasn't sure what help could be given directly but would ask Officers to advise as it could be quite complex on responsibilities.

Question 8

From Cllr Caroline Rackham to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

The Local Government Review seems to be guiding us towards joining with Southampton. What is the leadership doing to put the case for our area being of a very different economic character and to ensure that our local economy is protected from a 'big business comes first' attitude?

Reply

Thank you for your question. Let me be absolutely clear: the leadership of New Forest District Council is working tirelessly to rebut the notion that our area should be absorbed into a Southampton-led model. The New Forest is not an extension of a city, it is a unique rural district with a distinct economy, identity, and set of challenges that demand a tailored approach.

We are undertaking significant, evidence-based work to make this case to Government and our partners. This includes:

- *A comprehensive place-shaping exercise, capturing the economic, environmental, and social character of the New Forest and the Waterside.*

- *Targeted engagement through workshops and focus groups, to ensure that local voices are shaping the future of local governance.*
- *A wider programme of research, drawing together data, lived experience, case studies and insight to build a compelling and credible case for a rural-focused authority.*

Option 1, our preferred model, would create a rural unitary authority that brings together like-minded areas such as Test Valley, Winchester, and East Hampshire. This model is not about size; it's about fit. It allows us to design place-based services that are rooted in the needs of rural communities, not dictated by the priorities of an urban centre.

We reject the idea that economic growth must come at the expense of local character. Our economy is built on a blend of sustainable tourism, small businesses, agriculture, and environmental stewardship, as well as the larger industries along the Waterside. Option 1 supports this by enabling local economic strategies that reflect our values and protect our assets, including the National Park and our coastline.

We are not standing still. We are actively shaping the future, and we will not support any proposal that compromises the identity, economy, or democratic voice of the New Forest.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding if the Council didn't get option 1 what would be the Council intending to do with its LGR research, the Leader confirmed that they would use the research in the best possible way to support what the New Forest and its residents want, which was option 1, joining with like minded councils it was not under any circumstances being led by a city organisation.

Question 9

From Cllr Sean Cullen to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

Your consultation response asks for clarity on funding scale, timing, and district council roles. What thresholds would cause you to withhold support—for example, if devolution funding is insufficient or district representation on the new Mayor's board is only 'observer' level?

Reply:

Thank you for your question. At the heart of the Government's devolution agenda is a promise: that powers and funding will be brought closer to communities, not further away.

For that promise to be kept, the governance structures must be credible, inclusive, and locally grounded.

That's why I was clear in my consultation response, that clarity on funding scale, timing, and governance is essential. If Devolution fails to deliver meaningful investment, or if the knowledge, skills and expertise currently held by district councils are not tapped into, then it risks becoming devolution in name only.

We are working to actively promote that any new governance model includes:

- Formal roles for district leaders during transition, to safeguard service continuity.*
- Protections for local representation, ensuring that rural voices are not drowned out.*
- A clear pathway for local knowledge to shape the design of new services, not just during transition, but long after.*

Our residents deserve a devolution deal that empowers them, not one that centralises power under the guise of reform.

However, to manage Cllr Cullen's expectations – it is only the Upper Tier Local Authorities who are asked by Government to take forward the establishment of the Mayoral Strategic Authority and as such it will be these councils who are taking the decision to proceed, whether the deal delivers for local residents now and in the future.

Question 10

From Cllr John Haywood to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Holder, Cllr Steve Davies

Home Electric Vehicle chargers have been an important part of our green infrastructure for many years now. Notwithstanding the convenience of

home chargers, in Ringwood electricity from the public chargers in our Furlong car park costs 56p / kWh, whilst from home chargers it costs a little as 6p / kWh, so there is a clear need for home chargers to support the economics of driving an Electric Vehicle. A welcome enabler for drivers of Electric Vehicles who do not have a drive is that Hampshire Highways have approved cross-pavement charging with appropriate cable protectors.

New Forest District Council should be actively enabling our council tenants who wish to reduce their carbon footprint and save money by driving Electric Vehicles, and this means supporting home charger installations as widely as possible. Can the portfolio holder advise how many Electric Vehicle charger installations have been approved for our council tenants this year, how many have been rejected, and how many of the approvals were for properties without a drive where the charging cable must cross a public footway?

Reply

Thank you for your question, you raise an important point in regarding Hampshire County Council permitting cross pavement charging from home chargers with suitable protectors. However, this is not a blanket acceptance by Hampshire or us. We both need to take account of the individual risks and the nature of our rural areas, such as places with no street lighting or cars parked a long distance away from charging points requiring extra - long cables. Each tenant alteration request is looked at on a case-by-case basis.

This council is committed to help tenants reduce their carbon footprint where possible, that's why we are making significant investments in our council housing stock towards achieving better energy efficiency in our homes.

In answer to your question, the Housing service has received 22 alteration requests for home EV chargers in the last 12 months:

We have approved 14

We have 1 pending decision and declined 7

Reasons for decline are:

- *The charging cable would go over a walkway, and there were no allocated parking spaces – 4 cases*
- *Not eligible due to tenancy type and term – 2 cases*
- *The car would need to charge on a main road with no allocated parking space - 1 case*

Housing will continue to assist tenants to install electric vehicle chargers where it is able to do so both legally and safely.

Second questions

Question 11

From Cllr Adam Parker to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Corporations are known to employ 'change management' departments. People instinctively don't like changes and need to be told why changes are (or can be) positive. Sorry if I've missed some memos, or if some of these calls pre-date my election, but I wonder how much consideration the 'change' aspect was given for this roll-out - not least in the total lack of guidance and advice for councillors in pre-empting some of the issues that have arisen and the amount of confusion on new expectations out there. Did we expect it to be perfect? Here's a classic, and lower priority, example: a residents' glass collection is missed. Should they leave the glass out for another ad hoc collection, or should it be assumed they need to wait a month for the next one?

Cllr Parker has apologised if he has missed memos. I would refer him to the Cllr briefings held so far, most recently in April, which are still available for him to view on our intranet should he wish to do so. I also refer him to the very detailed written briefing, already referred to in a previous answer this evening, sent to all Members in May.

We did not expect such a complex and significant service change to be perfect, and ALL of our conversations with other councils who have already made such changes suggested there would be some disruption in the early days. As already explained this evening, the service change has gone well for the vast majority of residents and any teething problems will be resolved.

Third questions

Question 12

From Cllr Adam Parker to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Whose idea was it that we should fill out postcards with pleasantries and praise to give to collection teams, should we encounter them? What was the genesis of this idea? And, opening the floor, has any councillor done this and what was the response?

Reply

As members will be aware, the implementation of a service of this scale, affecting 80,000 households and introducing significant operational change, has placed considerable additional pressure on our frontline crews. In recognition of that, officers brought forward a range of ideas to the Waste Project Board. The purpose of those proposals was to ensure that we appropriately acknowledge the hard work, adaptability, and commitment of our staff throughout this transition.

The idea of thank you postcards was one of a number of suggestions presented by the communications team as part of a wider package of informal staff recognition measures. Other suggestions included visits to depots by councillors and senior officers, internal communications to highlight positive resident feedback, and small low-cost tokens of appreciation.

The thank you postcard concept was a simple and cost-effective gesture designed to allow managers and councillors to provide personalised recognition to individual crew members or teams.

I understand that so far take-up has been limited. Nonetheless, where they have been used, the intention was to provide a genuine, human note of appreciation.

It is important to emphasise that the postcards were never presented or intended as a standalone measure. They formed part of a wider internal recognition approach that included direct visits to depots by myself and other councillors, senior leadership engagement with staff, and ongoing

efforts to ensure that staff morale and wellbeing are supported throughout this complex operational change.

We are continuing to review all aspects of the rollout, including staff support and internal communication. I am grateful to all our crews for their ongoing professionalism and dedication, and I am confident that members across the chamber will join me in recognising the vital role they play in delivering this frontline service for our residents.