

**Council – 15 September 2025 –
Questions Under Standing Order 22**

First Questions

Question 1

From Cllr Alan O’Sullivan to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Could the portfolio holder please update Council on the preparations being made for phases 2 and 3 of the ongoing rollout of the new Waste Service, and lessons being learned from phase 1?

Reply

Plans are well advanced for our Phase 2 roll out, which is focussed on the west of the District. All residents in this area have received initial letters to explain the changes, and bin deliveries to households are on track, with over 6,000 properties delivered to so far. New frontline staff for phase 2 have been employed and are being trained. This means we are on schedule to commence collections in this area on 20th of October. Phase 3 preparations are also continuing, with bin deliveries due to commence after Christmas, and some early recruitment has already taken place for Phase 3.

The lessons learnt from Phase 1, and the necessary actions being taken, were reported to Cabinet on the 3rd of September and are being actioned and monitored frequently by the Waste Programme Board. This includes actions around pay, recruitment, training, communications, route planning and how we deal with collections on the open forest. These changes will ensure that this hugely significant modernisation of our services continues as programmed.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding the service disruption problems faced by waste services in neighbouring authorities, with for example, staff shortages and lead times for new vehicles, the Portfolio Holder reported on the complexity of the service improvements and that it was an intricate logistical exercise. He highlighted that resources were a challenge and that market supplements had been applied to support the retention and recruitment of staff. Crews operated in a cleaner and safer way with the new service and this was attractive for staff. The long lead time for new vehicles had been identified and orders placed over a year ago, and therefore the council was in a good place for the next two phases of the roll out. In addition, there is contingency in place, to hire vehicles should the need arise.

Question 2

From Cllr Alvin Reid to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Steve Davies

I have recently seen an announcement of new Shared Ownership homes. This has appealed to a number of people, not least those looking to get "on the ladder", but opportunities are hard to find. Can the portfolio holder please give some indication of when and where such opportunities might be expected next?

Reply

We are currently marketing newly built council homes for shared ownership for two properties in Brockenhurst and in Fordingbridge, where the first phase of 14 houses and flats is due to complete next week. In New Milton work has just started to build 16 shared ownership properties for the Council at Danes Park, and another 10 are now under construction in Bransgore, land south of Derritt Lane. In addition to this, there were several other schemes also coming forward through Housing Associations.

Vivid have several new developments in their New Forest pipeline and have recently started to market shared ownership homes in both Ashurst and Fordingbridge; a further 8 are under construction in Sway, and 23 are due to be built in Hordle. And at Dibden Purlieu Aster's Orchard Gate, development is now well advanced and is to include 14 homes for shared ownership, in order to meet demand. This had been clearly laid out in local plan policies.

Note: In response to a supplementary question, regarding the options for first time buyers who might find it difficult to get a mortgage, the Portfolio Holder reported that for shared ownership properties, it was not necessary to have a mortgage. A deposit of between 10-50% of the property value was required. This deposit could be obtained in a range of different ways. Rent would be paid on the remaining amount and that rent was lower than the market rent. Viability checks would also be carried out to ensure the property was affordable for those applying for shared ownership properties.

Question 3

From Cllr Ian Murray to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole

With the imminent launch of the New Forest Community Lottery Scheme, can the portfolio holder please provide a progress update?

Reply

I welcome the opportunity to provide a very timely update on the New Forest Community Lottery. A launch event was held on 9 September with 71 different groups attending from across the district.

In just a few days 24 organisations have already joined the lottery, and we know from the positive feedback there are more applications to come. These groups are now actively promoting the lottery, and we will complement this with our own communications, with the first weekly draw going live on Saturday 27 September.

After 1 year of operating the community lottery there will be a report to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to provide a full update, and in the meantime, I trust my fellow members will promote joining the lottery to voluntary groups in their own communities.

Note: In response to a supplementary question about how to sign up, the Portfolio Holder reported that information was available on the resident's section of the NFDC website. There was also information to address any concerns about gambling and details on how local charities could sign up.

Question 4

From Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine to the Leader, Cllr Jill Cleary

With LGR impacting on our Corporate Plan priorities, and subsequent amendments made earlier in the year, can the Leader please update us on how this is going, and whether we need to make any adjustments?

Reply

Our strategic delivery plan, which monitors delivery of our corporate plan priorities, is being kept under review and an updated version will be presented to Resources & Transformation Overview and Scrutiny panel in September before Cabinet in October. We are not recommending the removal of any additional activities from the list but we are conscious that capacity will continue to be stretched, and new priorities related to the delivery of LGR will emerge.

Considering the capacity we will need to deliver key projects, including LGR, officers are developing a Programme Management Office (PMO). This will bring increased structure and assurance to the development and delivery of priorities and management of resources.

We will need to continue to review priorities against our resources and where necessary take informed decisions to increase or decrease activity

in certain areas to ensure the best outcomes over a more limited timeframe.

The updated strategic delivery plan is appended to our corporate peer challenge update which illustrates that despite the challenges of LGR we continue to make good progress.

Question 5

From Cllr Allan Glass to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Derek Tipp

Can the portfolio holder give an update on progress since the publication of the Skills Action Plan at July Cabinet?

Reply

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to highlight this important area of work which the Council is undertaking. We know that unemployment generally is rising and young people are particularly affected.

Since July, much has happened with the Skills Action Plan. A new Strategic Group is now in place and has already held its first meeting, with its first working group focusing on young people. Nearly £200,000 of Government UK Shared Prosperity Funding is backing new programmes — from start-up support and apprenticeships to digital skills and outreach to young people not in education, employment or training, known as NEET.

We've also partnered with Maritime Solent to boost local careers in the marine sector - the first local authority to do so. By working with Maritime Solent (a hub organisation which connects the many different parts of the marine industry) we will ensure that the local training and apprenticeship programmes are aligned with real industry needs – helping businesses access a skilled workforce, helping residents into quality jobs, and so driving economic growth across the district.

To champion small business, we're implementing the New Forest Scale Up Support Programme to help small businesses grow quickly and sustainably as well as sponsoring the Best Micro Business Award at the New Forest Business Partnership "Brilliance in Business" Awards — entries close 30 September.

Lastly our relaunched business e-newsletter now reaches over 3,000 subscribers, sharing opportunities and updates across the New Forest.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding the identification of skill gaps and shortages, through research carried out to date, the Portfolio Holder recognised that a lot of research had been carried out and several key skills shortages affecting the New Forest

workforce had been identified. A notable gap in finance professionals was highlighted, alongside a broader need for vocational apprenticeships to support local industry demands. There were also concerns about a shortage of soft skills training, particularly in communication and teamwork.

The COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a contributing factor, having limited young people's access to social and professional development experiences. Additionally, the rise of remote working has reduced opportunities for workplace social interactions, further impacting the development of these essential skills.

Other identified challenges included a lack of local support for entrepreneurship, a persistent emphasis on university pathways over vocational training, and concerns about the potential defunding of BTEC qualifications. These issues could significantly impact student pathways into key growth sectors such as engineering, exacerbating existing skills shortages.

The Action Plan intends to reduce these gaps through targeted training, enhanced career guidance, and stronger employer-education collaboration. These will be essential measures for supporting the local labour market.

Question 6

From Cllr Richard Young to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Jeremy Heron

Could the portfolio holder please advise how the recent increase in workload for customer services is being managed?

Reply

As everyone will know, the waste service roll out has increased contact with customer services. Primarily, the first port of call is to deal with the issues and to reduce level of calling. It is also important to continue to support residents and to provide information to them. The service suffered with difficulties in the early stages of the waste roll out. I am pleased to say that an additional 4 new customer services staff have been appointed to join the existing team, which will improve in delivering key messages and help to keep residents informed. This is also the job of the local ward cllrs. I am pleased to say that the average call time response is between 9-10 minutes and in addition to this, any emails received were being responded to in a more timely manner.

Question 7

From Cllr Christine Ward to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Can the portfolio holder please update on coastal management measures in place in preparation for winter storms?

Reply

The Coastal Team will monitor and assess weather forecasts and tidal conditions throughout the winter period (as is the case throughout the whole year). This includes assessing the monitoring and forecasting reports from multiple sources.

However, we are also supporting practical interventions to reduce the impact of winter storms. These works and inspections also include:

- *Shingle Recycling at Hurst Spit, where secured EA funding*
- *Works to provide additional rock armour protection to a short section of failing seawall towards the eastern end of Milford-on-Sea*
- *Completion of detailed inspections of our coastal assets, including beaches, seawalls, and groynes, to assess their condition and effectiveness.*

These measures help us to reduce risk, protect communities, and maintain the integrity of our coastline during severe weather events. Should there be storm impacts on our coastline the Coastal Team will undertake reactive assessments and surveys to determine the extent of any impacts and actions required.

Question 8

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

How many properties has the original survey this authority has undertaken, been confirmed as not being suitable to take wheelie bins across the district? and how many more are we now discovering cannot take wheelie bins as we roll them out?

Reply

The original survey work carried out by Keep Britain Tidy indicated that just under 5,000 properties (6% of the total), would be unsuitable for wheeled bins. As you would expect, that is a live dataset, and some changes are being made as the rollout commences and engagement with

our residents continues, with small tweaks being made in both directions, i.e. some properties allocated sacks have been able to accommodate bins, and vice versa. Unfortunately, the original dataset was not broken down into phases, and with us being part way through the rollout it is not at this stage possible to determine exact numbers. This will be possible at the end of the rollout and I am happy to return to this question at a later date, but Officers are not expecting a significant overall change from that original figure of 5,000.

Note: In response to a supplementary question regarding discrimination against the households deemed unsuitable for wheelie bins, but were no longer being supplied with black bags for waste, the Portfolio Holder reported that black bags were being provided. He acknowledged that those properties which were unsuitable for wheelie bins would continue to receive a bag collection service.

Question 9

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

I was speaking to a woman in Lymington the other day who hasn't had her food waste collected on five separate occasions in the last couple of months. She is just one person but there are hundreds more in the Marsh Lane and Lower Buckland Road areas of Lymington, who are losing faith in the Council's ability to collect the bins. When will Residents get the Service they pay for?

Reply

I once again would like to apologise to those residents who have had collections missed. As a result of crews becoming more familiar with their new rounds, as well as the provision of more resources as laid out in the report to Cabinet earlier this month, we are seeing improved completion of our collection rounds, and ensuring that residents receive the level of service reliability that they expect, and that we should provide.

We continue to advise residents affected by service disruption to record this via our missed collection webform, as this is the fastest route to a resolution. Missed collections are flagged directly into the new in cab units.

Note: In response to a supplementary question about when the specific issues in Lower Buckland Road and Marsh Lane would be resolved, the Portfolio Holder reported that all issues were being addressed.

Question 10

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

What specific risk assessments, monitoring, and mitigations measures has NFDC put in place to prevent farm animals (donkeys, ponies, pigs, cattle) from accessing food waste, and what legal advice has been sought on potential liability should an outbreak of notifiable disease be traced to the current collection system? And, how does NFDC's current instruction for bins and food waste caddies to be left at property boundaries adjacent to grazing land reconcile with legal biosecurity obligations, given that this creates direct opportunities for livestock access?

Reply:

Animal interactions with food waste or general waste (when food is mixed in) is common in waste collection with most damage occurring from sack collections. In phase 2 and 3 areas there is still significant littering from damage from foxes, badgers, herring gulls, crows, etc., which is a significant cost burden on the council.

It is recognised that this is an issue in areas open to grazing livestock. As highlighted in the report to Cabinet earlier this month, the council has put into place extra collection resources so that food waste containers can be collected from behind gates in the open forest ahead of this year's pannage period and are working on a permanent solution. The Cabinet report indicted an in principle decision to collect food waste form behind gates beyond the pannage period, in the areas with free roaming animals, subject to a business case which is being developed by officers.

This demonstrates this administration's commitment to manage and adapt this complex service change, to ensure it delivers on the goals of the Waste Strategy and keeps staff, residents and livestock safe.

Note – this question was dealt with in writing in the absence of Cllr McCarthy.

Question 11

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

Under the LGR proposed option 1 what reassurance can be given to the people of Marchwood and the Waterside regarding the tangible benefits of the Freeport to the Community and improvements to local infrastructure?

Reply

Thank you for the question.

Under Option 1 of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation, the Waterside would remain part of a wider rural-based unitary authority which would keep the New Forest whole. This is key to ensuring that communities like Marchwood and the Waterside benefit directly from the Solent Freeport.

This local control means we can focus investment where it matters most, push for infrastructure improvements, and make sure the Freeport delivers real opportunities for local people – including jobs, skills, and better connectivity.

We're working closely with Freeport partners on taking forward this Council's priorities as key deliverables for a successful Freeport. Tangible examples of progress include the recently adopted New Forest Skills Action Plan, the delivery of improved cycling/walking infrastructure across the Waterside, work on progressing a masterplan for Totton town centre and the expected planning application for the upgrade of the A326.

We will continue to press for outcomes that reflect our community's needs. Option 1 gives us the best platform to do that – keeping decisions local, accountable, and focused on delivering tangible benefits.

Question 12

Cllr Phil Woods to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden

Could the portfolio holder please confirm what the income from car parks in Fordingbridge was in the last financial year?

And further, has the portfolio holder noticed any increase in Saturday income from these car parks since the 19th of July, following the launch of the weekly Parkrun event?

Reply

The 24/25 meter income received from Fordingbridge Car parks amounted to £161,144.

In the 8 weeks since 19 July just under £12,000 has been collected on Saturdays. In the preceding 8 weeks £9,400 was collected, whilst in the comparator period last year this amounted to just under £8,000.

I wish to congratulate the people of Fordingbridge for making the new parkrun event a success noting that 1,800 participants and volunteers have taken part since it began.

Note: In response to a supplementary question, recognising that parkrun was bringing people into the town and whether as an incentive to encourage more people into the town in order to support local businesses,

whether there could be a trial in NFDC car parks in Fordingbridge to provide one hour free parking, the Portfolio Holder responded recognising that there were many voluntary organisations doing brilliant work across the district and which might benefit from access to free parking. The Portfolio Holder felt that the current parking policy was right.

Question 13

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

This September sees another residents survey of our rivers for Waterwatch and I will be out taking samples and testing on the Bartley Water. Has the Portfolio Holder signed up to do the same?

Reply:

As Cllr Rackham is aware Waterwatch is a community led organisation assisting residents to survey local watercourses.

Statutory requirements placed on NFDC with regards to water sampling only concerns the regulation of private drinking water supplies and does not require the council to sample or regulate watercourses. This is a function undertaken by the Environment Agency (EA).

However, NFDC does facilitate the annual reporting of bathing water quality, as reported by the EA, during the months of May – September at designated bathing waters in the New Forest district, including coastal waters from Calshot to Barton-on-Sea, and the river Avon at Fordingbridge.

I am routinely informed of findings regarding this council's duties, and I am satisfied officers are meeting these duties.

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

Question 14

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

In light of the Minister's letter of 24 July warning they will intervene if councils cannot agree on local government reorganisation—and given the dismal consultation response rate of under 2%, with fewer than half supporting your preferred Option 1—will you now return to your Conservative colleagues at County and seek a joint proposal that reflects cooperation and credibility, or will you persist with this lemming-like dash towards the cliff edge?'

Reply:

Thank you for your question. Let me be clear: the residents of our district have not only been given a voice - they stood up and were counted. In a matter of weeks, this council and partners across Hampshire mobilised a comprehensive engagement campaign across every ward, reaching thousands of residents. The New Forest's response to the county wide engagement was nothing short of exceptional - with 3,141 responses from our district alone, we nearly matched the entire Hampshire and Solent area's total of 3,492 in the County Council's separate survey, of which over 400 of those responses were from our residents.

While the consultation response rate may appear modest in percentage terms, it exceeds recognised benchmarks for reliable public engagement, especially given the pace at which we were required to act.

This wasn't just about numbers - it was about meaningful participation. We ensured that every resident had the opportunity to understand the proposals and share their views, supplemented by deliberative engagement with residents and further work to understand the priorities of partners such as businesses and town and parish councils. The clear message from all of this work is in support of Option 1 and I encourage Cllr Clark to read the full report to Council and Cabinet which will be published this week.

Let me also be clear on our position: we do not support local government reorganisation. But we are committed to working with all partners - including our colleagues at County, to secure the best possible outcomes for our residents. That means engaging seriously, acting responsibly, and ensuring that whatever emerges from this process is credible, deliverable, and in the public interest.

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

Question 15

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

Why is there no clear financial risk equalisation model outlined in the proposals, especially when business rates and income deprivation levels differ so significantly between areas? And how will transitional funding be secured and governed to ensure one-off reorganisation costs don't lead to service reductions or council tax increases in the medium term?

Reply:

There has been a full and thorough financial evaluation process led by KPMG and supported by the Section 151 Officers across the Hampshire authorities. The case presented to us is in keeping with previous, and other current LGR case for change proposals across the Country, and we have to be reliant to a degree that the commissioned experts know what they are doing and is in accordance with the government are expecting.

Funding strategies for the costs of implementing the proposed new authorities will be a challenging task, and one that will need to be taken on by the Shadow Authority, and the statutory officers it employs as the new Councils prepare for their go-live. Council Tax decisions will also be taken by the new authority, with it likely that there will some clarity issued within the structural change order that forms the new authority, to achieve harmonisation across the new administrative area. I would also find it incredibly frustrating to see any reduction in services, but that will be out of our control, especially considering the size and scale of the new authority, and the challenges it will face in critical demand led services such as Adults and Children's services. All this whilst bringing together a number of existing separate authorities, and disaggregating the County Council – it's going to be an incredibly busy few years, all for LGR not wanted by this administration!

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

Question 16

Cllr David Harrison the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jill Cleary

In his letter of 24 July, the Minister makes clear that councils must not take decisions that compromise the future financial sustainability of any new unitary authority, and he urges the inclusion of robust data and shared assumptions in all proposals.

Given this, why did NFDC proceed with a public consultation that contained no meaningful financial modelling, no costings of transition, no analysis of projected savings, and no comparative data on council tax or service delivery?

Do you accept that, without this information, residents have effectively been led up the garden path?

Reply:

Let me address this directly. The engagement we undertook was not about presenting a fully costed business case, which now comes as part of the formal submission process. And to be clear the Government will be

undertaking the formal consultation with residents as LGR is ultimately their decision.

What we delivered, was a rapid, district-wide engagement exercise to understand how our residents feel about the principles of local government reorganisation, take views on the options being developed and also to explore the priorities of our residents. This will not only inform our proposal, but it also stands as credible evidence for future unitary councils in how services could be designed and delivered to meet the needs of our communities.

I fully accept that financial modelling is critical. That's why, in parallel to the engagement work, we've been undertaking detailed work on the financial implications of each option - transition costs, projected savings, council tax harmonisation, and service delivery impacts. That work is complex, and it must be robust.

To suggest that residents were somehow misled is not only inaccurate, it's disrespectful to the thousands who took the time to engage thoughtfully with the process. They were not led up the garden path. They were invited into the conversation early, and rightly so.

Our priority has always been to secure a financially sustainable solution for our residents. And whilst we would not wish to spending time on reorganising local government, if the government are to pursue fundamental changes to the structures that deliver vital services to our communities, it is right that we continue to engage in the process, to secure the best outcomes possible.

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

Second questions

Question 17

**Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy,
Cllr Derek Tipp**

Across the New Forest, more and more family homes are being lost to second homes and short lets, making it harder for local people to find somewhere affordable to live. Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that we need a new planning category of use for second homes, so this council has the power to manage numbers and protect housing for local families? And if he does agree, will he write to the Government to request this change on behalf of the Council?

Reply:

Thank you for raising this issue. As a Conservative, I strongly believe in the freedom of the individual, and so I am very reluctant to bring in policies which restrict the right of people to own a second home. We already impose a council tax premium of 100% on those who do so, affecting 1200 properties in our district. Your suggestion would be likely to lead to people taking evasive measures, such as couples purchasing properties in their individual names, enabling them to get a 25% discount on council tax as a single occupier.

Don't forget that wealthier people will spend money in the area, so boosting the economy. A free market is the best way to grow the economy. Limiting the market is likely to discourage developers to come to the area.

Short-term let properties are also an important part of the economy and part of the free market. If there is a demand, we should encourage it to be met.

So my answer is "no" I do not want to see this measure introduced, so I won't be writing to the government to encourage them to do so.

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

Question 18

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

Could the Portfolio Holder please tell me how much income the Totton car parks made last financial year?

Reply:

The 24/25 meter income from the Totton Car parks amounted to £98,582.

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