

15 SEPTEMBER 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held on Monday, 15 September 2025

* Cllr John Sleep (Chairman)

* Cllr Dave Penny (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
- * David Hawkins
- John Haywood
- * Jeremy Heron
- * Nigel Linford

Councillors:

- * Patrick Mballa
- Colm McCarthy
- * David Millar
- * Ian Murray
- * Stephanie Osborne
- * Alan O'Sullivan
- * Adam Parker
- * Neville Penman
- * Dan Poole
- * Caroline Rackham
- * Alvin Reid
- * Joe Reilly
- * Janet Richards
- * Barry Rickman
- * Steve Rippon-Swaine
- * Michael Thierry
- * Derek Tipp
- * Neil Tungate
- * Alex Wade
- * Malcolm Wade
- * Christine Ward
- * Phil Woods
- * Richard Young

*Present

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje, Karen Wardle and Matt Wisdom

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Frampton, Haywood and McCarthy.

25 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

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

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

27 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**Former Councillor – George Dart**

The Chairman reported with great sadness of the passing of former Cllr George Dart. George had been elected in 2003 to the North Totton Ward and served continuously for 12 years, until 2015.

George served on the Economy and Planning Review Panel, the Environment Review Panel, Planning and Transformation Review Panel and the Planning Development Control Committee.

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended sincere condolences to George's family and friends, and placed on record the Council's thanks for his service to the District.

Chairman's Engagements

The Chairman reported on the following engagements undertaken since the last Council meeting:-

Bower Lodge School in Dibden

The Chairman had attended the official opening of Bower Lodge School in Dibden and cut the ribbon with the senior management team, parents and school staff. The School Head, Jemma Dudgeon gave a guided tour of the new school building, which was very modern with facilities and brand new equipment throughout.

Civic Day

The Chairman's Civic Day had been held at Hanger Farm, Totton, where the facilities on offer were showcased with the Manager, Jay, Director of Social Enterprise, who spoke about what they do as well as what Minstead Trust and Furzey Gardens also offered. The day was a great success and the Civic Heads who attended were very impressed. He understood that some had already visited Furzey Gardens.

New Forest & Hampshire County Show, Brockenhurst

At this event, staff had shared information about recycling and the new waste service. The Chairman reported he had spoken to many stall holders and visitors throughout the day.

Silver jubilee anniversary celebration of Fordingbridge Museum

The event had been attended by distinguished guests and a guided tour of the museum was interesting and informative.

Flag raising of the VJ80

The Chairman reported he had attended this, alongside Cllr Alvin Reid, the District Council's Armed Forces Champion at Appletree Court.

Hampshire Scout Exhibition

The Chairman reported he had been pleased to attend the Hampshire Scout Exhibition return from Malawi, on Friday 1 August, where the scouts did a brilliant production and spoke about their experiences and how much it had affected them. They discussed the masses of work achieved at the three schools, this included decorating, building a brick kitchen room and cementing holes in floors and walls.

Salisbury Arcade Totton

The Chairman reported he had had the privilege to officially open the Salisbury Arcade, Totton. The event had been attended by Cllr Jill Cleary, Cllr Jeremy Heron and officers. The improvements made by NFDC enhanced the wider area.

Friends of New Forest Airfield memorial service

The Vice-Chairman, Cllr Dave Penny had attended the Friends of New Forest Airfield memorial service to remember those who flew from the New Forest airfield. It had been a lovely and well attended afternoon.

28 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader made the following announcements:

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

The Leader's focus at the current time was on securing the best possible outcome for the New Forest as the future of local government was being decided. Members would debate LGR at the Special Council meeting on 25 September. The Leader assured members that the council remained focused on the delivery of improvements to the district and people right now.

Ballard Lake, New Milton - Greenway Recreational Mitigation Project

The official opening to mark the completion of the improvements was held on Tuesday, 9 September. The Leader reported that she had attended the opening alongside Cllrs Blunden and Tipp, and was pleased to cut the official ribbon and to see the local beauty spot benefiting from accessible seating, improved footpaths and a picnic bench for residents and visitors to use to enjoy the views of the lake.

Salisbury Road Arcade, Totton

The Leader reported she had attended the official opening of Salisbury Road Arcade. The District Council had invested over £200,000 into improvements to Salisbury Road Arcade. At the opening event on Thursday, 11 September she got to see the improvements including new and reduced roof canopies, new ceilings, lighting, new branding signage, cycle racks, a public seating area as well as other aesthetic and material improvements to add vitality to the space.

Apprenticeship Hub

The District Council had teamed up with New Forest Business Partnership to deliver a new Apprenticeship hub. This would boost local skills, support residents and strengthen the economy of the district. It was funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The hub would ensure that businesses had the right people with the right skills for the future. It would help people of all ages access apprenticeships and training making it easier for them to gain the skills needed and be able to access jobs closer to home.

Silver award from the armed forces Employer Recognition Scheme

The District Council had recently been awarded silver from the armed forces employer recognition scheme. It was a prestigious award, recognising the ongoing commitment to support the armed forces community. The armed forces staff champion, Wesley Pay, who works in housing maintenance collected the award on behalf of NFDC. The award was testament to the commitment to support serving personnel, veterans and military families across the district. The award had been displayed outside the Chief Executive's office.

29 REPORT OF CABINET - 6 AUGUST 2025**PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET**

There were no speakers on the items resolved by Cabinet at its meeting on 6 August 2025.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**Item 5 – Revised Transformation Strategy and Business Case**

Cllr Cleary introduced the item and moved the recommendations. She highlighted that the transformation strategy was a key element in the Corporate Plan and that transformation needed to be seen through the lens of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), looking at activities and investment. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A councillor questioned whether any lessons learnt from the rollout of the new waste strategy had been included within the updated strategy.

One member spoke in support of the revised transformation strategy, recognising the importance of maintaining a flexible approach in light of LGR.

RESOLVED:

That Council:

1. Noted the revised business case position; and
2. Approved the revised transformation strategy

Item 6 – Principal Risk Register Review

Cllr Cleary introduced the item and moved the recommendation. In doing so, she highlighted that the update to the Principal Risk Register was to meet the

requirements of the council's Risk Management Policy and to ensure that the council was compliant to the corporate governance requirements in relation to risk management. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A member noted risk PR14 (Waste Strategy Implementation) within the Principal Risk Register and felt that the problems experienced within phase 1 roll out had not been identified fully within this risk. It was highlighted that at the next Audit Committee meeting, members would consider this in more detail.

RESOLVED:

That the Principal Risk Register updated be adopted.

30 REPORT OF CABINET - 3 SEPTEMBER 2025

PART I – ITEMS RESOLVED BY CABINET

Item 1 – Financial Monitoring Report (based on performance April to June 2025 inclusive)

A councillor acknowledged that the report detailed funding spent on the waste roll out and sought clarification whether an update would be provided of further unbudgeted expenditure.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate clarified that the report detailed funding received from Defra of £151,000 and that a further £150,000, agreed by the Section 151 officer, had been allocated to the initial changes to the waste service roll out and the way the food waste was collected.

PART II – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Item 2 – Review of new waste collection service phase 1 roll out and motion to suspend phases 2 and 3

Cllr Blunden introduced the report and moved the recommendation, which sought that Council endorse the six Cabinet resolutions, as the correct and proportional response to the motion. Cllr S Davies seconded the motion.

A number of members spoke raising concerns that the report and response did not adequately address the issues raised in the first phase of the roll out. It was felt that lessons learnt from the phase 1 rollout had not resolved the problems encountered by residents and that until they could be rectified, it was felt that the phase 2 and 3 roll out should not proceed.

The issue of donkeys accessing waste was raised and the 'behind the gates' policy which had been introduced for the pannage period within areas open to livestock. It was acknowledged that donkeys could access waste all year round and the view was expressed that a long term 'behind the gates' policy should be adopted, without waiting for the business case for come forward, and that Cabinet recommendation 3 be amended to reflect this. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate addressed this matter and expressed confidence that a 'behind the gates' collection policy would be maintained in the long term, however, good financial management was necessary to ensure that the costs associated with the proposed policy change were budgeted for, in line with financial regulations, and recognising that the council

was accountable for expenditure of public money. It was therefore important to go through the due process before committing to any policy change.

Some ward members spoke from the Lymington and Pennington areas, raising the ongoing issue of missed food waste collections in Lymington, Pennington and Buckland. It was recognised by one member, that the situation had improved, but further work needed to be done. It was hoped that the problems experienced by residents in phase 1 would not be repeated in the future phases of the roll out.

One member spoke about the residents in the phase 1 roll out feeling that that they had not been listened to and that customer services had been difficult to contact due to the volume of enquiries. It was felt that the Extraordinary Council meeting had had a positive impact with clear evidence of listening to the concerns raised by residents and members and responding to them.

A few members referred to a recent site visit to discuss with local residents the problems experienced in Brockenhurst. One member had not felt reassured that the issues had been resolved and noted that the panning season had not commenced at the time of the site visit, and concern was raised that the problems experienced in Brockenhurst could arise in the phase 2 roll out, in particular for the residents in Godshill and Hyde areas.

Members speaking in support of the recommendation recognised that the council had been responding to the problems identified through the phase 1 roll out and put in place mitigating actions and improvements the service. Learning from phase 1 was expected to benefit residents in phases 2 and 3. Views were expressed to support the roll out of phases 2 and 3 as programmed. It was highlighted that any pause or delay to the roll out could put the funding received at risk. It was also highlighted that some residents wanted the roll out to proceed as planned, as the new service would address problems with seagull strikes with the current sack collection service. One member felt that the roll out of the new service had been conducted in an acceptable way and whilst acknowledging that there had been some issues, in general it had been a success.

It was highlighted that some Cabinet members were part of the Waste Steering Group and it was suggested that in addition to this, backbench members be appointed to express their views on the roll out of the waste service. This was supported by some other members. It was also suggested that in order to improve communication, ward members be provided with details of any missed collections to disseminate to residents. Furthermore, clarity was sought in relation to the KPIs on the waste service, highlighting that this was a core service affecting all residents and that there should be clear monthly data reported against relevant KPI's.

Members recognised the importance of providing a good waste and recycling service to residents and that it was necessary to get it right.

Cllr Blunden responded to the debate, acknowledging that he had listened to the concerns raised and the constructive solutions put forward. There had been an opportunity for members to put forward their views at various meetings, including the Extraordinary council meeting as well as Cabinet. All suggestions and comments had been picked up by the Waste Steering Group and he assured members that these had been considered.

It was suggested that details of individual cases be provided through the waste advisor route, to resolve any ongoing problems.

It was highlighted that recommendation 3 from the Cabinet meeting, gave an, in principal agreement, to prevent livestock in the forest accessing food waste, with a permanent behind the gates policy. This demonstrated a clear direction of travel, but it was necessary to consider the detailed costs associated with this policy and that it would need to go back to Council for a decision.

RESOLVED:

That Council endorse the Cabinet's resolutions, as the correct and proportionate response to the motion.

31 QUESTIONS

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

- From Cllr O'Sullivan to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, regarding the lessons learnt from phase 1 of the rollout of the new waste service.
- From Cllr Reid to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr S Davies, regarding future shared ownership home opportunities.
- From Cllr Murray to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Poole on progress of the New Forest Community Lottery Scheme.
- From Cllr Rippon-Swaine to the Leader, Cllr Cleary, regarding the impact of LGR on the Corporate Plan priorities.
- From Cllr Glass to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp seeking a progress update on the Skills Action Plan.
- From Cllr Young to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Heron on the workload of customer services.
- From Cllr Ward to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden on the coastal management preparation for winter storms.
- From Cllr M Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the property surveys for wheelie bins.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on uncollected food waste in Marsh Lane / Lower Buckland areas.
- From Cllr McCarthy to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on risk assessment and mitigation to prevent animals accessing food waste.
- From Cllr Mballa to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the tangible benefits of the Freeport.
- From Cllr Woods to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on parking income from the Fordingbridge car parks.
- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the Waterwatch scheme.
- From Cllr M Clark to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on LGR and a joint proposal with Hampshire County Council.
- From Cllr Dowd to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on LGR and the potential for service reductions or council tax increases in the medium term.
- From Cllr Harrison to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary, on the NFDC LGR public consultation.
- From Cllr J Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, Cllr Tipp, on the loss of family homes to second homes and short term lets.

- From Cllr Rackham to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Blunden, on the parking income from the Totton car parks in the last financial year.

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

32 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 J Davies moved the following motion:-

Re-instating the one-hour free parking period on Lymington High Street

Council notes:

- That Hampshire County Council is responsible for on-street parking across the county, including in the New Forest.
- That the free on-street parking period in Lymington has been reduced from one hour to just twenty minutes.
- That local shopkeepers and residents have raised concerns that twenty minutes is not long enough for people to use multiple shops, visit cafés, or support local services on the high street.
- That Lymington and Pennington Town Council recently voted to support the campaign by shopkeepers for the reinstatement of the one-hour free parking period on Lymington High Street.

Council believes:

- That the reduction from one hour to twenty minutes free parking is damaging to the vitality of Lymington High Street.
- That a reasonable period of free parking supports both residents during a cost-of-living crisis and our small businesses who rely on local footfall.
- That the council should support the campaign by local shopkeepers in pressing for fairer parking policy.

Council recommends:

- That the Leader of the Council writes formally to Hampshire County Council requesting the reinstatement of at least one hour of free on-street parking in Lymington (with correspondence to be made available to all councillors).
- That the council engages with local business groups, chambers of commerce, and residents' associations to gather evidence on the impact of parking policy on high streets across the district, to strengthen the case for fairer parking provision.

Cllr J Davies addressed the motion, highlighting that Lymington high street was at the heart of the town, that it was a place of history, business and of community. The heart was being weakened as a result of the HCC decision to remove the one hour free parking, therefore impacting on residents and businesses. He asked that the council request HCC to restore the one-hour free parking in support of Lymington businesses, the people and the future of the town.

Cllr M Wade seconded the motion.

Cllr Cleary proposed an amendment to the motion which added the following points under council notes:

- That work is already underway to address concerns about parking policy, including active engagement by local Lymington ward councillors with residents, businesses, and Hampshire County Council.
- That ward councillors have been working to raise awareness of the impact of the reduced free parking period and to support the campaign for reinstatement through formal and informal channels.
- That this local work has helped to bring attention to the issue.

Cllr Cleary also proposed an amendment to the motion that the following bullet point be removed, under council recommends:

- That the council engages with local business groups, chambers of commerce, and residents' associations to gather evidence on the impact of parking policy on high streets across the district, to strengthen the case for fairer parking provision.

Cllr Heron seconded the amendment.

A number of members spoke in opposition to the amendment on the basis that they felt it would slow down any decision, and that the retailers needed more immediate support to ensure their financial sustainability. It was felt that the District Council should do all it could to engage and to show support to local businesses.

Members who spoke in support of the amendment felt that it demonstrated ongoing support for retailers. It was recognised that the local members, in particular Cllr Dunning, had been working with local businesses to put pressure on Hampshire County Council to restore the one-hour free parking and that a deputation would be made at a HCC Universal Services Committee meeting on 20 October which would discuss on street parking across Hampshire. It was felt that the amendment should be supported as it sought to support to work being carried out by the local ward councillors.

Cllr J Davies reported that he had no concerns regarding the inclusion of the additional points proposed under "council notes", however he did not support the removal of the point under "council recommends", as he felt it was crucial to the intention of the motion. He therefore did not support the amendment.

Put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Members went on to debate the substantive motion.

Those who spoke in support of the motion recognised that the removal of the one hour free parking had had an impact, with a reduction in footfall on the high street and that the businesses and retailers had seen this impact with reduced trade. A petition had been brought forward by a local shop owner and this had 7,000 signatures, requesting to change the free parking period to one hour. It was recognised that if a town like Lymington had seen an impact in footfall as a result of the parking charge, then other towns, such as New Milton or Hythe in the district would also see an impact if similar parking charges were introduced. Members

therefore felt it was important to support the towns and the local businesses in the district.

One member suggested that the District Council could consider options around the NFDC car parks and provide an hour free parking to support local businesses and the high street.

RESOLVED:

Re-instating the one-hour free parking period on Lymington High Street

Council notes:

- That Hampshire County Council is responsible for on-street parking across the county, including in the New Forest.
- That the free on-street parking period in Lymington has been reduced from one hour to just twenty minutes.
- That local shopkeepers and residents have raised concerns that twenty minutes is not long enough for people to use multiple shops, visit cafés, or support local services on the high street.
- That Lymington and Pennington Town Council recently voted to support the campaign by shopkeepers for the reinstatement of the one-hour free parking period on Lymington High Street.

That Council further notes:-

- That work is already underway to address concerns about parking policy, including active engagement by local Lymington ward councillors with residents, businesses, and Hampshire County Council.
- That ward councillors have been working to raise awareness of the impact of the reduced free parking period and to support the campaign for reinstatement through formal and informal channels.
- That this local work has helped to bring attention to the issue.

Council believes:

- That the reduction from one hour to twenty minutes free parking is damaging to the vitality of Lymington High Street.
- That a reasonable period of free parking supports both residents during a cost-of-living crisis and our small businesses who rely on local footfall.
- That the council should support the campaign by local shopkeepers in pressing for fairer parking policy.

Council recommends:

- That the Leader of the Council writes formally to Hampshire County Council requesting the reinstatement of at least one hour of free on-street parking in Lymington (with correspondence to be made available to all councillors).

33 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes.

34 FUTURE MEETING DATES FOR 2026/2027

RESOLVED:

That the following meeting dates for the 2026/27 municipal year, be agreed (Mondays, 6.30 pm):-

2026

18 May – AGM (Already agreed)

13 July

14 September

12 October

14 December

2027

22 February

12 April

17 May - AGM

CHAIRMAN

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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.