

Copythorne Annual Parish Meeting – March 7th 2023

Item 5 – District Councillor Report – Cllr. Derek Tipp

NFDC Council Report 2022 – 2023

The past year has continued to be challenging as the Council has had to deal with the rise in inflation and increased pay awards (costing the council an additional £2.2million). Despite this, a balanced budget for 2023 to 2024 has been achieved with a 2.99% increase in council tax. Amazingly this works out at only £3.73 per week for a band D property for all the NFDC services. Of course, this figure is only a part of the overall council tax bill, with much larger sums required for HCC. Adult social care, alone, costs almost as much as the whole of NFDC services.

Increasing homelessness is another area of concern which is expected to cost an additional £1million in the coming year for bed and breakfast, and another £750,000 in 2024 to 2025. Our leisure centres are also suffering from the effect of inflation, particularly on energy costs relating to swimming pool heating. As residents feel the effects on their own living costs they are cutting back on use of these facilities. Thankfully the council has partnered with Freedom Leisure and so the situation is much better than it would have been otherwise. However, we still have to contribute an extra £270,000 this year. This needs to be compared to the expected savings of around £10million over the course of the contract.

NFDC intends to invest an additional £300,000 in community safety, including enhanced CCTV coverage across the district. Over the last four years the Council has built or purchased over 200 new Council homes, with over 300 more to be delivered by 2026.

In December 2023 the Government gave final approval for the Solent Freeport to go live, one of the first three to be approved. It is predicted to deliver over 16,000 new high-quality jobs and generate more than £1.3 billion of private sector investment. The Freeport will enable the Council to retain nearly £500million in tax revenue over the next 25 years to spend on improvements to the local infrastructure including major work to the A326.

Preparations are, of course, now in place for the quadrennial elections which take place on 4th May. This time the wards have all been enlarged as the number of councillors has been reduced from 60 to 48. This ward now includes the whole of Copythorne Parish as well as Bramshaw, Ashurst and Netley Marsh. Some form of photo ID will be required to vote at a polling station this time. This can be a driving license, passport, bus pass, or blue badge among others. Anyone with no suitable ID can apply to the council for a Voter Authority Certificate. For the first time the count will take place on the day after the election.

There is to be a Rural Fund (in total £540,000) issued by Defra to the Council to be allocated during 2023-24 to give grant support of between £5,000 and £15,000 to improve community facilities, such as village halls, in our rural areas. The NFDC Economic Development Team is ready to advise applicants and administer the process.