

Annual Report for the Year 2025 on NFDC

It has been another challenging year financially with the government reducing our expected funding settlement by £0.5 million. Also the promised re-imbursement of the increase in employers National Insurance only covered 25% of it, leaving another £0.5 million deficit. Despite this a balanced budget has been achieved with a council tax increase of £5.98 for the year for a band D property.

This includes £8 million for the new waste service which will comply with new regulations to include a weekly food waste collection and the wheely bins which will make the work safer. We have also spent another £8 million on our new depot in Hardley to replace the one at Hounsdown.

I can also report that the Council underwent a corporate peer challenge which reported very positively about the working of the Council, particularly the leadership, which was very encouraging.

£13.5 million has been set aside from the ring-fenced housing revenue account for repairs this year as we continue to improve the quality and energy efficiency of our council housing. New challenging targets have been set by government for housing and recent surveys have shown that our tenants have scored us highly and we are among the best council housing providers in the country.

We are also set to spend £45 million on new council homes over the next 3 years. This will only make a small, (though important) dent in the long waiting list for homes. As you may have heard, the government wants to get 1.5 million homes built across the country by 2029, including 30,000 in the New Forest over the next 20 years, according to their formula.

We are currently putting together a new Local Plan which will look at the many constraints we have which should substantially reduce this figure. But even if we are able to persuade a planning inspector to cut this number in half it will still be an enormous challenge, considering we are currently building only half of that. The government want to reduce the power of planning committees by using pre-set policies to be fast-tracked by planning officers.

On a more positive note the Council continues to fund many excellent projects across the district with its various schemes including the CIL money which comes out of new developments. Over £11 million of CIL funding will be spent over the next 3 years across the district to improve town centres, open spaces, sports facilities among many others.

Of course I cannot avoid mentioning the bombshell announcement of local government re-organisation which has somewhat deflated the mood at the Council. We are all passionate about delivering a first-class service to the area we know and have served for many years. The idea of being merged into a much larger council is bound to mean that each area has less focus and different priorities emerge. No decisions have been taken about who we will be merged with. Discussions are ongoing and in the coming months we will find out whether any agreement at all can be reached. If not then we may have to leave our future in the hands of the government – not a prospect any of us want.

I hope there will be an opportunity soon for you all to have a meaningful say in a proper consultation. I believe it is wrong that this should have been announced before any consultation. It is ironic that the alleged purpose of this, according to the government white paper, is to “bring democracy closer to the people.”

DEREK TIPP

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