



HARTLEPOOL
BOROUGH COUNCIL
OFFICER DECISION RECORD

Department:

Division:

Date of Decision / Issue
of Licence:

Officer Making Decision: MRS DG MCGUCKIN

Subject / Description &
Reason for Decision:
(for publication)

One of the factors contributing to the riots in Hartlepool in August 2024 is believed to be people feeling disenfranchised and that life is unfair due to poverty and a perception of not receiving what they're entitled to. Recent research by Loughborough University indicates that in Hartlepool over £339m is not being claimed in benefits and entitlements that could lift households above the breadline.

There is evidence that funding benefits maximisation capacity delivers a significant return on investment. In 2023/24 the Council invested £111k in a contract to deliver financial support for local residents and over £1.5m in benefits was claimed as a result. This covers a wide range of benefits but relates predominantly to Personal Independence Payments (44% of claims), Attendance Allowance (14% of claims), Disability Allowance for a Child Under 16 (6% of claims), Universal Credit (5% of claims) and Pension Credit (5% of claims).

In response to the work of the Poverty Truth Commission and feedback from the riots, all adult social care staff are now receiving mandatory training to support benefits maximisation and have access to an online benefits calculator, EntitledTo. There is a risk that this increased awareness generates demand without additional support being available for the more complex cases that will undoubtedly arise.

It has therefore been determined that additional benefits maximisation support will be provided to support people with more complex benefit claims.

Within the Voluntary, Community Sector Enterprises (VCSE) there are three locally based providers of benefits maximisation within Hartlepool – Advice@Hart, Citizens Advice Bureau and West View Advice & Resource Centre. All three have current contracts with the Council and have been commissioned to provide additional capacity between 14 October 2024 and 31 March 2025. Each organisation has received £20k to provide an additional 160 benefits assessment appointments during this period, meaning that a further 480 people are supported to access the benefits they're entitled to. The number of appointments provided and the outcome of each assessment in terms of applications made and the associated monetary value of awards will be monitored by the Commissioned Services Team. An Exemption to Contract Procedure Rules to support contracts being varied was approved on 4 October 2024.

It is proposed that the additional cost of £60k is funded from the £600k allocated to Hartlepool for recovery and community resilience, subject to approval by Finance & Policy Committee in November. If this is not agreed, the cost will be met from reserves, which will reduce the availability of reserves to support the Council's financial position, but ensure that a short term need is addressed.

Type of Decision:

Non Key

Nature of Delegation Being Exercised: MD8 In consultation with the Leader (or in his absence the Deputy Leader), Chair of the relevant Committee (or in his absence Vice Chair) Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, the Managing Director (or in his/her absence the authorised Executive Director) may take a decision normally reserved to Full Council or a Committee* where:

- (a) Failure to take the decision quickly would, or would be likely to, harm the interests of the Council and the public.
- (b) The decision is so urgent that it cannot wait until the next meeting of the Committee at which the decision would normally be taken.

*Committee delegation - Determination of usage and oversight of grant funding in relation to grants that fall within the Policy Committee's remit, where required under the conditions of grant.

Alternative Options Considered & Rejected: The option of seeking alternative providers was rejected in favour of using existing providers who are Hartlepool based and have the required knowledge and experience to deliver the support needed.

Any Declared Register of Interest: No

OFFICER WITH THE DELEGATION

NAME: MRS DG MCGUCKIN
POSITION: Managing Director

IN CONSULTATION WITH...

NAME: Brenda Harrison
POSITION: Leader & Chair of Finance and Policy Committee

NAME: Gary Allen
POSITION: Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee

NAME: JILL HARRISON
POSITION: Exec Director of Adult & Community Servs

NAME: JAMES MAGOG
POSITION: Director of Finance, IT & Digital

NAME: HAYLEY MARTIN
POSITION: Director of Legal, Governance & HR