

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

6 December 2024

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

Present:

Councillor: Karen Oliver (In the Chair)

Councillors: Ben Clayton, Sue Little, Corinne Male, Christopher Wallace and Mike Young

Councillor Boddy as substitute for Councillor Cook in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2

Parish Council Representatives:

Stephen Smith (Greatham) and Lyn Noble (Dalton Piercy)

Also present:

Edwin Jeffries and Stephen Williams, HJTUC

Officers: Tony Hanson, Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services
Kieran Bostock, Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Services
Sylvia Pinkney, Assistant Director, Regulatory Services
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

26. Chair's Opening Statement

The Chair referred to the significant challenges faced during the decision making process in relation to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, highlighting that this was a national issue. It was noted that it was important to continue to provide statutory obligations in key service areas such as children's and adults' services and ensure the Council was in a stable and sustainable financial position to deliver those services. In view of the financial pressures driven by rising costs and demands for services, there had been a lot of hard work undertaken to focus on mitigating any adverse impacts on local people, particularly vulnerable people.

27. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fiona Cook.

28. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Sue Little declared a personal interest in minute 30.

29. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2024.

Received.

30. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 to 2027/28 *(Director of Finance, IT and Digital and Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

To provide an update on the MTFS and to enable the Committee to scrutinise/comment on the savings proposals referred from the Finance and Policy Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services reiterated that all councils across the country were facing significant financial challenges owing to the impact of inflation and demand on services along with historic inadequate increases in government funding to meet these challenges. As outlined at Finance and Policy Committee in November, the Council had a forecast budget deficit of £10.519m for 2025/26 and £13.122m over the full MTFS period.

As in previous years, addressing the deficit needed to be managed through budget saving actions which seek to minimise the impact on services where possible and use of reserves. With regard to savings, proposals totalling £2.954m had been proposed for 2025/26 and a total of £3.109m over the MTFS period. Pending publication of the local government finance settlement in late December, the acceptance of the proposals for 2025/26 and utilisation of reserves at the indicated level of £3.5m would leave a remaining budget gap of £4.065m. It is currently assumed that Hartlepool's allocation of the increases in government grants will meet this remaining gap for 2025/25. Should the government funding not be sufficient to close the remaining gap, additional savings will need to be identified and approved for 2025/26. Details of the individual savings were provided in Appendix B with the items relevant to this Committee shaded.

A discussion ensued during which Members were conscious that identifying savings was a regular consideration given the current financial climate, however, it was noted that pension reforms were being explored on a

national level and this was welcomed. A Member sought clarification on the partnership working on the new waste treatment facility and the Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services confirmed that an update report on the future operation of a waste treatment facility within the South Tees Development Corporation area would be considered at a future meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Committee. It was noted that Hartlepool was working in partnership on this project with six other local authorities and they were Darlington, Redcar, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Durham.

A Member commented that pride in the town needed to be revived and a significant amount of work had been undertaken to maintain services under the financial restraints faced by the Council and compared to a lot of other local authority areas, a lot of services had been maintained. The Chair added that there had been savings year on year but that this level of savings could not be maintained as it would impact on the residents of the town. However, officers were commended on their hard work to secure additional external funding which had continued to make improvements in the most deprived wards.

In response to a question from a Member, the Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services confirmed that the Council had a duty and legal responsibility to respond to emergencies which would ultimately lead to financial consequences and therefore additional pressure on budgets.

A Member informed the Committee that access to £600k of the Government's Recovery Fund had been secured to examine the causal factors of the riots that had taken place in the summer in the town and this was facilitated by the Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Services alongside a group of Elected Members. This group would look at social cohesion, resilience and how to improve standards in the future. Members were encouraged by this positive action and asked for further information to be circulated.

Decision

The savings proposals detailed in Appendix B relating to the services within this Committee portfolio were approved to be reported back to Finance and Policy Committee on 20 January 2025.

31. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 11.50am

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

PUBLICATION DATE: 13 December 2024