

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

9 December 2008

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Robbie Payne (Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Graham Frankland, Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection
Paula Bass, Revenues Manager
Emma Dixon, Estates Manager
David Dockree, Temporary Estates Manager
Sarah Bird, Democratic Services Officer

29. Financial Inclusion Developments *(Chief Financial Officer)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to advise the Portfolio Holder of the policies and practices operating within Revenues and Benefits designed to provide sustained levels of support to the residents of Hartlepool during the current economic down turn.

Issues for Consideration

The Revenue and Benefits Service to the people of Hartlepool must be efficient and effective but also responsive to the need of individuals experiencing financial hardship in the current financial climate. Benefit applications had risen by 45% on the same period last year and repossession in the Borough had almost doubled. Collection levels for both council tax and business rates were suffering.

The Revenues and Benefits Anti-Poverty Policy was developed in 2004 in conjunction with partners, and provided an 'umbrella' under which genuine hardship cases were dealt with by formally prioritising debts and providing a framework within which officers could deal effectively and independently with

hardship cases.

A number of initiatives had been established to ensure that the Revenues and Benefits Services were more accessible to those who most needed support. Staff worked closely together and took referrals from people in need and referred on to specialist debt counsellors where necessary. These initiatives were outlined in the report which had been circulated and included:-

- ❖ Mobile Benefits Service
- ❖ Recovery and Money Advice Liaison Officer
- ❖ Benefits Liaison Officer
- ❖ Community Engagement Officer
- ❖ Hartlepool Financial Inclusion Partnership
- ❖ Internal Bailiff
- ❖ Hartfields development

Future initiatives planned were :-

- ❖ Promotion of Credit Union bank accounts
- ❖ Extension of the Community Engagement role
- ❖ Money Management education for secondary schools
- ❖ Hotspots referral scheme
- ❖ Support for Lone Parents
- ❖ Increasing affordable housing

The Portfolio Holder asked why Hartfields residents had been selected as needing guidance when there were other areas of the town to which the service would be applicable. He was informed that there were a number of surgeries throughout the town in housing offices and the residents of Hartfields had been selected with it being a new supported housing development. Some residents had experienced problems with Council Tax banding and support had been given to guide them through appeals.

The Portfolio Holder referred to the support for lone parents, specifically in regard to the flyer to be sent out with Housing Hartlepool rent statements and suggested that the Hartbeat magazine be involved with this. He was informed that the Press Office were undertaking some work to provide publicity for the changes in benefit assessment processes.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder approved the measures and initiatives outlined in the report to provide sustained levels of support to lone parents, pensioners, families and vulnerable individuals within the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder also approved the setting up of a managed revenue underspend, reserved to ensure the continued funding of the initiatives.

30. Council Tax Base 2009/10 *(Chief Financial Officer)*

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to the calculated Council Tax Base for 2009/10 which would be used for council tax billing.

Issues for Consideration

The Council was required by law to calculate its Council Tax Base for the forthcoming year, and inform the major precepting authorities and local precepting authorities before 31 January 2009. The Council Tax Base was expressed as the number of band D equivalent properties and the Calculation of Tax Base calculus was outlined.

The Council had made significant and sustained progress in improving its in-year collection over the last 5 years which had enabled the Council to reduce its non collection rate by 0.5%. However, due to the current economic climate it was proposed that this rate be set at 1.5%.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether this would have an impact on Council Taxpayers in Hartlepool and was informed that it should not.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder approved the Council Tax base for 2009/10 of 27621.8

The Portfolio Holder also approved a Council Tax Base for those Parishes capable of levying a precept upon the Council's General Fund:

Brierton – 12.1
Claxton – 15.5
Dalton Piercy – 103.2
Elwick – 402.3
Headland – 1006.9
Greatham – 668.1
Hart – 296.5
Newton Bewley – 32.9

31. Proposed Inscription Changes to the Victory Square War Memorial *(Head of Procurement Property and Public Protection)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to request the Portfolio Holder's approval to change one name and add another to the Victory Square War Memorial.

Issues for Consideration

The report outlined restoration work which had recently been carried out to the War Memorial situated in Victory Square, which was funded by the Local Authority and the Wolfson Trust/English Heritage. Requests had been made by two parties, one requesting a name change and the other the addition of a name. It had initially been planned to seek permission to carry out the alterations whilst the main contractor was still on site but the research to corroborate the information supplied had taken some time to complete. It was proposed to arrange for the original contractor to return to site and carry out the alterations. The additional works could be carried out within the revised budget agreed at Cabinet on Tuesday, 27 May 2008.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder approved with pleasure, the request to make the changes.

32. Repairs to St Hilda's Church Clock (*Head of Procurement, Public Protection and Property Services*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to inform the Portfolio Holder of a range of essential repairs to the Grade 1 listed St Hilda's Church Clock and to seek approval to fund the repairs from the Planning Maintenance Programme.

Issues for Consideration

The Local Authority was responsible for the maintenance of St Hilda's Church clock and repairs deemed necessary were outlined in the report. Repairs were anticipated to cost in the region of £25,000 and could be funded from the uncommitted part of 2008/09 Corporate Revenue Planning Maintenance Budget.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the report and approved the work to be undertaken and funded from the Planned Maintenance Programme.

33. Tall Ships – Procurement of Medical Services *(Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to an exception from the Council's Contract Procedure Rules in respect of medical services for the Tall Ships Event.

Issues for Consideration

The tripartite working arrangement which the Authority currently had in place with the North East Ambulance Services, British Red Cross and St John's Ambulance could bring to the event expertise and knowledge gained through working and exercising together over several years. This tripartite had worked as a coordinated service at a number of large events, e.g. the Great North Run and Liverpool Tall Ships. The British Red Cross and St John's Ambulance would be able to provide between 80 and 100 trained first aiders per day from the area with others in reserve.

The tripartite had quoted a cost of £61,000 for undertaking required services throughout the event and this would provide good value for money when compared to private sector providers. The University Hospital of Hartlepool had agreed as part of the medical provision package to increase resources to deal with minor injuries during the event and this would need to be renegotiated at potential additional cost if external service providers were used.

The value of the medical services to be provided would normally require a competitive tender under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

The Portfolio Holder stated that he was very reluctant to exempt items from tendering but queried whether the British Red Cross and St John's Ambulance would benefit financially locally. He was informed that there would be financial benefits as well as experience gained by the organisations.

The Portfolio Holder asked whether there could be some kind of initiative to encourage local residents to participate in a first aid course. The Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection said that he would convey this to the organisations. He would also raise the issue with Procurement Staff that exemptions from the Contract Procedure Rules were to be exceptions.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder approved the exception to the Council's Contract

Procurement Rules in procuring medical service for the Tall Ships Event.

34. Land at Maxwell Road, Hartlepool (*Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection*)

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to outline a request received for a small area of land to be encompassed into a site for social housing.

Issues for Consideration

The report detailed the nature of the land which was adjacent to land which had been purchased by the Council's former rent office at Owton Manor. A new housing scheme was now proposed on this land and Housing Hartlepool had requested that the adopted footpath which would not be required if the development went ahead, be transferred to them.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder refused authority to proceed with the transfer of land.

35. Chief Executive's Departmental Plan 2008/09 – 2nd Quarter Monitoring Report (*Chief Financial Officer, Chief Solicitor and Director of Neighbourhood Services*)

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to inform the Portfolio Holder of the progress made against the Chief Executive's Departmental Plan 2008/09 in the first six months of the year.

Issues for Consideration

The Plan set out the key tasks and issues within an Action Plan to show what was to be achieved by the three relevant divisions of this department in the coming year and described how the department contributed to the Organisational Development actions as laid out in 2008/09 Corporate Plan. The Council now uses a software package called Covalent to collect and analyse corporate performance and progress is monitored using the following statuses:-

- ❖ Achieved target
- ❖ Expected to achieve target
- ❖ Target not achieved
- ❖ Not expected to achieve target

Within the Finance, Legal and Procurement Divisions there were a total of 68 actions identified in the 2008/09 Departmental Plan. A total of 32 actions had been reported as having achieved their targets and a further 27 noted as expected to achieve their target.

There were 8 actions which had been highlighted as not achieving target and 1 action was not expected to be achieved by its due date.

The Plan contained 54 actions which were the responsibility of the Finance Department. By the end of the first six months, 26 actions had been completed and a further 20 were assessed as being on target. However 8 actions had not achieved their target and the report contained further details on these. Two of these actions relating to the development of arrangements for the Centralisation of Financial Administration, Debtors, Payments/Receipts and other Financial Administration had been deferred for a number of reasons and these were expected to be rescheduled once the proposals from the business transformation review were issued.

The legal division had 10 actions in the Plan. 6 of these actions had been completed and a further 4 were on target to be completed by the target date. The Chief Solicitor outlined achievements by the department including the re-accreditation of the Law Practice standard, although issues with storage of documents had been raised.

The Portfolio Holder asked whether there would be a report from the Procurement Division and was informed that there were no performance indicators although there were some Actions. An update would be brought to a future meeting.

The Portfolio Holder queried the issues around the provision of storage in the legal department and was informed that there may be storage options at the Archive Buildings or old Connexions building. The Chief Solicitor and Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection agreed to discuss this further.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the achievement of key actions and date changes were approved.

36. Emma Dixon, Estates Manager

The Portfolio Holder asked that his thanks and appreciation be given to Emma Dixon, Estates Manager who was an outstanding, first class officer and a credit to the department. He stated that he had enjoyed working with

her and wished her all the best in her new post with Durham PCT.

37. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 38 – Land Corner of Green Street and Burn Road (Para 3 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

Minute 39 – Proposed Grazing Licence Brenda Road (Para 3 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

38. Land Corner of Green Street and Burn Road (*Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection*)

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to obtain Portfolio Holder approval to the sale of a small parcel of land at the corner of Green Street and Burn Road

Issues for Consideration

The report contained background information with regard to the land and details of the proposed sale thereof.

Decision

The decision is outlined in the exempt section of the minutes.

39. Proposed Grazing Licence Brenda Road (*Head of Procurement Property and Public Protection and Head of Community Safety and Prevention*)

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to seek approval of the Portfolio Holder to the proposed granting of a grazing licence at land at Brenda Road.

Issues for consideration

The report contained background information and the proposed terms of the proposed grazing licence.

Decision

The decision was outlined in the exempt section of the minutes.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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