

ADULTS AND PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

3rd August 2009

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

Present:

Councillor Gerard Hall (Adult and Public Health Services Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Jill Harrison, Assistant Director of Commissioning
Sylvia Pinkney, Consumer Services Manager
Sylvia Tempest, Environmental Standards Manager
Jane Kett, Principal Environmental Health Officer (Commercial Services)
Jo Wilson, Democratic Services Officer

7. Carers Strategy (*Director of Adult and Community Services*)

Type of decision

Key –tests i and ii apply.

Purpose of report

To gain approval for adoption of the Carers Strategy for Hartlepool for financial years 2008/9 to 2010/11 and subsequent action plan.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

Hartlepool's Carers Strategy was developed in partnership with local carers taking into account the national priorities set by Government. An associated action plan had also been included, to be monitored by carers through the Carers Strategy Group which meets on a bi-monthly basis. The Council receive over £390,000 yearly grant to spend on carers and support services. The budget constraints of this grant had been taken into account and appropriate funding for any new services proposed.

The Portfolio Holder noted that the yearly grant was not ring fenced. The Assistant Director of Commissioning confirmed this but advised that its use was monitored therefore any usage not for the purposes of carers and support services would need to be justified. The Portfolio Holder commented upon the number of hours carers worked voluntarily each week, equating to £100 million a year saved from the public purse. He queried how the yearly grant was spent and was advised that this was used to fund a number of services including carers support and information and

the carers emergency respite service as well as funding a proportion of the carers officer post. Further details regarding how the grant is used would be brought to a future meeting.

The Assistant Director indicated that Carers Strategy and associated action plan had not been included within the papers, suggesting that this item be deferred until these documents could be circulated. This was agreed by the Portfolio Holder.

Decision

That consideration and approval of the Carers Strategy for the local authority be deferred to the next meeting of the Adult and Public Health Services Portfolio.

8. Replacement of Cremators – Stranton Crematorium *(Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection)*

Type of decision

Key – tests i and ii apply

Purpose of report

- I. To update the Portfolio Holder on works necessary to meet the requirements of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) regarding Mercury emissions and operation of cremation equipment.
- II. To inform the Portfolio Holder of updated costs of implementing the requirements and suggest options for funding the works.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In October 2004 DEFRA published detailed requirements regarding emissions and operation of crematorium equipment, including more stringent requirements for new crematoria from October 2006. Additional guidance in January 2005 also required authorities to consider options for achieving a 50% reduction in mercury emissions and indicate their intention to install cleaning equipment by end of 2012 or rely on emissions trading. In 1998 two cremators were installed at Stranton Grange Crematorium. These were due to be replaced between 2008 and 2013. In December 2005 the Portfolio Holder had given approval in principle to the replacement of both cremators with associated gas cleaning equipment and replacement of inadequate electricity supply. However in March 2009 the Portfolio Holder had deferred a decision on a proposed environmental surcharge equivalent to a 10% additional increase in cremation fees for more information on the cost of other providers and clarification of funding options for the work.

Details of the charges for cremations and burials in Hartlepool as compared with other areas in the region were given within the report. Discussions with the provider and maintainer of the current cremators indicated that the

cost of the replacement works in 2010/11 was likely to be around £1,000,000. If prudential borrowing were secured, the loan repayments would be approximately £90,000 per annum. It was confirmed that the cost of the cremation was approximately 19% of the total fees charged by Funeral Directors for the average funeral. There were two options for financing these works: prudential borrowing with repayments funded through an increase in cremation fees in 2011/12 or the introduction of an annual environmental surcharge on every adult cremation beginning 2009/10 with an additional fee increase in 2011/12.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether neighbouring local authorities were facing similar problems and how they were responding. The Environmental Standards Manager advised that all were in a similar position and some had already introduced the environmental surcharge. The Portfolio Holder expressed reservations about putting extra economic burdens on people during the current climate, particularly burdens of this nature. He recommended the use of prudential borrowing with increases in cremation fees from 2011/12 when it was hoped the economic climate might have improved. He indicated that he did not want it to appear that money was being collected before it was needed.

The Environmental Standards Manager advised that this recommendation would be referred to Cabinet for consideration as part of their Budget and Policy Framework process.

Decision

- I. That the report be noted
- II. That prudential borrowing with repayments to be funded through an increase in cremation fees from 2011/12 be recommended to meet the requirements of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- III. That this recommendation be referred for consideration by Cabinet as part of the Budget and Policy Framework process.

9. Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009-2010 (*Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection*)

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To consider the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan for 2009-10 which is a requirement under the Budget and Policy Framework.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report set out details of Hartlepool's Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009/10. This is a requirement of the Food Standards Agency and forms the basis on which the Authority may be monitored and audited to verify whether the service provided is effective in protecting the public. The plan sets out the Council's aims in respect of its food law service, identifying longer-term objectives as well as giving a review of performance for 2008/09. A summary of the main issues was outlined within the report and the complete plan was appended. It would be considered by Cabinet and Neighbourhood Service Scrutiny Forum prior to its ratification by Council.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the issue of staffing levels. He acknowledged that there was a national shortage of people with the relevant qualifications and commented upon the level of details officers were required to go into and the high degree of professionalism required. The public needed to be assured that the resources were in place to carry out the required inspections, particularly given the amount of statutory training which officers had to undertake. The Consumer Services Manager advised that officers were required to have a minimum of 10 hours training per year but this did not necessarily mean being out of the office, given the availability of e-learning. There was a full complement of Environmental Health Officers in place at the moment however covering shortages in other areas could impinge upon their work.

The Portfolio Holder raised concerns that in the current economic climate businesses might be less inclined to spend on health and safety. He queried what training checks and balances were in place for business employees and whether these were similar to those employed by the Licensing Department. The Consumer Services Manager indicated that training requirements depended on the nature of the business but they were checked by Council officers and if any training requirements were identified these were highlighted to the owners and appropriate advice given.

Decision

That the Portfolio Holder's comments on the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan for 2009/2010 be noted

10. Memorial Safety (*Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection*)

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of correspondence received from the Ministry

of Justice on memorial safety and to provide an update on works undertaken by Hartlepool Borough Council in recent years.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In January 2009 the Ministry of Justice issued new guidance for local authorities and other burial ground operators on managing the safety of burial ground memorials. Further clarification was provided in May 2009. The main focus was that works undertaken should be following a risk assessment process and proportionate to the risk of serious injury occurring. Copies of both the guidance and clarification documents were appended.

The report detailed the various surveys and inspections undertaken in Hartlepool to ensure the safety of memorials since 2001. All staff at the cemetery office and crematorium were trained and qualified through the National Association of Monumental Masons on memorial safety and fixing systems. To date there had been no liability claims regarding injuries from memorials in Hartlepool cemeteries.

The Portfolio Holder queried who was responsible for memorials in non-active cemeteries such as the North Cemetery. The Environmental Standards Manager advised that the North Cemetery was in fact still an open cemetery with re-openings held for new internments into existing plots. The family of the deceased were ultimately responsible for the maintenance of any memorials however as some of these were hundreds of years old they were not being properly maintained. In the case of churchyards which are not owned by the Council, the Parochial Parish Council (PPC) has responsibility for their maintenance. However, some of these 'closed' churchyards eg St Hilda's have transferred responsibility for grounds maintenance to the Local Authority. Any guidance of this nature is automatically forwarded to the individual PPCs and Council officers do also inspect memorials in these grounds. The Portfolio Holder asked if there had been any reports of damage to headstones caused by inclement weather. The Environmental Standards Manager reported that she was not aware of any and that the main reason for damage being vandalism or natural wear and tear.

Decision

That the report be noted.

11. E. Coli 0157 – The Pennington Report and Hartlepool's Response *(Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the findings from the Public Inquiry into the September 2005 Outbreak of E.coli in South Wales, led by Professor Hugh Pennington, which were published in March 2009. Also to outline actions being taken to ensure that the Council fully engages with the reports recommendations.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In September 2005 a major outbreak of E.coli 0157 occurred in South Wales, the second largest to date in the United Kingdom. 157 cases were identified during the investigation, mostly children. The Outbreak Control Team identified that cooked sliced meats in school meals were the likely source of infection through a failure in food hygiene practices at a catering butcher's premises. The proprietor was eventually sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for food hygiene offences.

The severity of the outbreak led to the setting up of a public inquiry. A summary of the final Pennington report was appended with the key findings and issues summarised for the Portfolio Holder's attention. A full list of the recommendations was also appended.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer highlighted recommendations relating to the inspection of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point principles (HACCP) plans, advising that officers would need to be even more thorough in their inspection of this documentation. As a result food hygiene inspections might take longer which would have an impact on officer time. Assurances were given that officer training requirements are kept under review. The Portfolio Holder queried whether procedures would be put in place to perform independent food hygiene audits on businesses bidding for contracts. The Principal Environmental Health Officer advised that officers already had detailed knowledge of, and information on, businesses who supply food to others, and that there were no comparable businesses in Hartlepool. In terms of school meal provision she had recently delivered a presentation on the Pennington Report at the NEPO AGM and had offered assistance in respect of providing advice on future food contracts.

Decision

That the current position of the Council in respect of the recommendations and progress to date be noted.

12. The Personal Social Services (PSS) User Experience Survey 2009 *(Director of Adult and Community Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To provide an overview of the findings from the 2008/2009 PSS User Experience survey of home care users in England aged 65 and over.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report detailed the findings from the PSS User Experience Survey for Hartlepool in 2009. This is part of a rolling programme of surveys intended to benchmark how well services are meeting service users' and carers' needs. Details of the methodology, response rate and profile of respondents were given within the report and a summary of the results outlined. This showed 56% were extremely or very satisfied with the help from Adult Social Care that they received in their home and 96% of respondents were always or usually happy about the way they were treated by the care workers.

The Portfolio Holder was surprised at the gender balance of respondents. The Assistant Director of Commissioning advised that this was probably a result of more women using home care than men, also in a household where a couple used home care they may only have sent one response via the woman. In terms of the low number receiving a Direct Payment and/or personal budget (6%) the Assistant Director of Commissioning advised that this may have been due to the way the question was phrased and the fact that home care services are not generally purchased using a Direct Payment – services either being delivered in house or via commissioned services. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that less than half of respondents (44%) had indicated social services always got back to them upon contact. The Assistant Director of Commissioning advised that this did not reflect the results of a recent review of the Duty Team where over 95% of respondents had been very satisfied with the response they received. This will continue to be monitored and links to work that is underway to improve how information is provided to people.

The Portfolio Holder also made reference to the forthcoming Green Paper on this issue, particularly the long consultation period. A briefing would be given to executive members in August and the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum in September. There were also consultation events planned for September in Darlington and Newcastle. These events have been organised nationally to facilitate consultation on a regional basis. There was no reason that a locally organised event could not take place in Hartlepool if this was felt to be necessary.

Decision

That the report be noted.

13. Update on Mental Health Integrated Services and Related Mental Health Issues (*Director of Adult and Community Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To update the Portfolio Holder on developments in Integrated Mental Health Services and related issues.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder was updated on progress in a number of areas including the introduction of the new Mental Health Act, improvements in access to psychological therapy services and social inclusion initiatives. Copies of the Mental Health Promotion Action Plan and report into the Department of Health Mental Health Local Implementation Team financial mapping for Hartlepool were appended to the report.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the stigma still attached to mental health problems, commenting that it was good to see the Council working closely with outside bodies as this would help create an environment where people were not labelled. He requested information as to how far engagement with the Third Sector had progressed. The Assistant Director of Commissioning advised that the Council had worked with a number of voluntary organisations (including Hartlepool Mind) for some time and work with smaller organisations had been encouraged through the recent procurement for the Improved Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) Service. In this case a consortium bid led by Mental Health Matters was successful, allowing a number of third sector organisations to work together and deliver a large scale project.

The Portfolio Holder queried how relationships with Tees Esk & Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (the local mental health provider) ensured a local focus given the large area covered by the Trust. The Assistant Director of Commissioning commented that the integrated mental health service locally works well with successful joint working within community based teams. The recent appointment of a General Manager responsible for Hartlepool and Stockton would ensure that there was a local focus and a route to address any concerns.

The Assistant Director of Commissioning further advised that the Government has recently launched a consultation regarding the future direction of mental health services (New Horizons). This would be brought to a future meeting.

Decision

That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.10 am

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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