

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

5 November 2009

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

Present:

Councillor Robbie Payne (Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Mike Ward, Chief Financial Officer
Joanne Machers, Chief Personnel Officer
Graham Frankland, Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management)
David Dockree, Temporary Estates Manager
David Hart, Strategic Procurement Manager
Paula Bass, Revenues Manager
Philip Timmins, Estates and Valuation Officer
Jim Ferguson, Senior Planning Officer
Liz Crookston, Principal Strategy and Research Officer
Richard Maynes, Locum Solicitor
Jo Wilson, Democratic Services Officer

62. Review of Postal Services – *Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To review the provision of postal services to the Council and to consider the option of carrying out a tender exercise for future provision.

Issues for Consideration

As part of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee a request was made to review the Council's postal processes and the procurement options for the provision of an alternate mail provider. The report to the Portfolio Holder gave details of this review and outlined the proposed process to formalise the arrangements by undertaking a tendering exercise with three postal services providers from the Office of Government Commerce approved suppliers list.

Decision

That a tendering exercise be undertaken as detailed within the report.

63. Tender for External Printing Support – *Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management) and Chief Personnel Officer*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to finalising the tendering process for the Authority's external printing support and agree the award to the successful companies.

Issues for Consideration

The majority of general printing requirements are met by the Internal Print Unit utilising the services of local printing firms to cover peaks in service and specialised work when appropriate. In August 2009 permission was granted by the Portfolio Holder for a formal tender process to be undertaken with a view to developing a specific procurement arrangement. At Contract Scrutiny Committee on 28th September 2009 11 tenders were put forward for consideration by an evaluation panel comprising the Central Services Manager, Strategic Procurement Manager and representatives from Procurement and Printing. The price/quality ratio was 40/60

The results of the panel evaluations were detailed within the report. Five companies were chosen to supply corporate printed stationery, general printed stationery and corporate documents. Three of the five companies supplying stationery were Hartlepool based as were two of the five supplying corporate documents. This was a positive commitment to the 'Buy Local' campaign which the Portfolio Holder was pleased to note.

A complete 'service delivery options' review on the Reprographics Unit was currently being undertaken by the Central Services Manager as part of Business Transformation. The results would be brought to Cabinet for consideration at a later date, a savings target of £30,400 had been set.

The Portfolio Holder queried who would choose which of the five companies would be given individual commissions and what safeguards were in place to prevent certain companies being favoured. The

Strategic Procurement Manager advised that individual assignments would be managed by Internal Print Services as primary user for the Council. If the services of an outside company were required each company would be offered the opportunity to quote for the work and the decision as to which would carry it out would be made by Internal Print Services based upon price and delivery options. This process would be carefully checked and an audit trail put in place. If any company were shown to be consistently failing to live up to expectations their place on the supplier list could be revisited.

The Portfolio Holder referred to comments he had received regarding the complexity of current tendering forms. The Strategic Procurement Officer acknowledged these concerns, saying officers were looking at developing a 'lighter' version of the current form. There was also the option of providing help to companies when completing the form, given the requirement that certain questions be asked.

Decision

- I. That the outcome of the tender exercise be noted
- II. That the undertaking of the Service Delivery Option review be noted

64. Irrecoverable Debts – Sundry Debt Invoices – Chief Financial Officer

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to write-out a number of Sundry Invoices, which are now considered to be irrecoverable.

Issues for Consideration

The Council's financial procedure rules provide that any debt due to the Council of over £1,000 could only be written out with the express permission of the Portfolio Holder. Whilst every effort was made to collect debts due to the Council certain debts become irrecoverable and the report sought the agreement of the Portfolio Holder to write these out.

The Portfolio Holder queried the time lag between certain business related debts. The Revenues Manager indicated that this was dependent upon the individual circumstances of the debtor and how successful officers felt actions taken to recover monies would be.

Decision

That the write-out of the attached Sundry Invoices be approved.

65. Cash Office Exit Survey – Chief Financial Officer

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To advise the Portfolio Holder of the results of an exit survey recently undertaken in the Civic Centre's Cash Office to gauge customer reactions to the proposal of ceasing the Council's cheque encashment service.

Issues for Consideration

In August 2009 a report proposing the cessation of the Council's cheque encashment service at the Civic Centre cash office was presented to the Portfolio Holder. The decision was duly deferred to allow an exit survey to be conducted with Cash Office customers to gauge their reaction to the proposal and assess whether they would be prepared to open an account with Hartlepool's Credit Union – Moneywise or use one of the more costly encashment services in Hartlepool. The findings from this survey indicated that the majority of customers using the Cash Office encashment service already had a bank account and knew that their housing benefit could be paid directly into it. 98% indicated that should the cash encashment service end they would use their existing bank account for payments or open a new account. 30% would be prepared to open a basic bank account with Credit Union.

The Principal Strategy Research Officer felt these results demonstrated that people were not totally reliant upon this service. Also the low numbers of the over 50s using the service showed that previous concerns as to the effect cessation would have upon the elderly were unfounded.

The Portfolio Holder queried why people with a bank account would continue to use the Civic Centre cash office. The Chief Financial Officer felt there could be a number of reasons including habit, concern that funds might not be deposited or being overdrawn. A future report would be brought to the Portfolio Holder with recommendations as to the future of the service.

Decision

That the exit survey results be noted.

66. Flu Pandemic – HR Policy – *Chief Personnel Officer*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To ask the Portfolio Holder to confirm his approval for the Human Resource Policy recommendations during a flu pandemic.

Issues for Consideration

A series of key decisions and recommendations were appended to the report summarising the proposed changes to the existing arrangements for reporting and managing sickness absence. These had been approved by the Corporate Management Team and Trade Unions although it was accepted that there might be some final detail amendments to the Plan.

The Portfolio Holder queried in-place monitoring arrangements for staff taking carers leave. The Chief Personnel Officer reported that carers leave was at the discretion of managers and it could be withdrawn if individual staff were felt to be abusing it. There was a special fast track appeals process in place should this be needed.

Decision

That the policy recommendations be approved.

67. Corporate Health and Safety Policy – *Chief Personnel Officer*

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

To seek Portfolio Holder endorsement of the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy.

Issues for Consideration

All companies employing more than five people must have a written health and safety policy. The Council's was adopted in July 2005 and it was now felt an appropriate time for revision. In its current form all departments were required to interpret it and put in place their own

policies. This approach resulted in some duplication and led to a risk of an inconsistent approach across the Council. In order to address this it was proposed to revise the Policy to ensure equal application across departments. Schools would be exempted from this approach as they were expected to develop their own policy for endorsement by their governors. A copy of the Policy was appended to the report. It had previously been endorsed by the Corporate Management Team and Trade Unions.

The Portfolio Holder referred to the Health and Safety Consultative Group. The Chief Personnel Officer confirmed nomination of members to this was the responsibility of the Portfolio Holder. Arrangements could also be made for this group to meet annually with departmental health and safety champions. An advisory session for elected members would also be scheduled.

Decision

That the Corporate Health and Safety Policy be endorsed.

68. Acquisition of Market Hotel, Lynn Street – Assistant Director (Head of Housing and Regeneration) and Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management)

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

To provide details regarding the purchase of a derelict former public house, the Market Hotel, Lynn Street, Hartlepool.

Issues for Consideration

Details were provided of the purchase of the Market Hotel, the funding that enabled the purchase, the housing development proposed on the wider site and the next steps required to enable the residential development. The Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management) advised that Growth Point funding had been secured to purchase the building and consideration was currently being given to future demolition. Additional funding had been sought for this, such this bid be unsuccessful alternative capital funding would be identified.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated staff on their efforts.

Decision

That the report be noted.

69. Review of the Strategic and Operational Leadership of Collaborative Procurement – *Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection*

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

To update the Portfolio Holder on the progress made by RIEP (Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership) Collaborative Procurement Board and NEPO (North Eastern Purchasing Organisation) on the review of the strategic and operational leadership of collaborative procurement within the North East.

Issues for Consideration

The report detailed the process undertaken to review regional procurement arrangements and issues which needed to be addressed to develop a more detailed business case for collaboration and a revised procurement strategy for the region. The Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management) highlighted the need for flexibility in any collaborative approach. This was echoed by the Portfolio Holder who did not want local businesses to be disadvantaged by any future procurement strategy. In terms of the options for governance and constitution the Portfolio Holder supported a joint committee comprising three members from each authority, thereby allowing for more inclusivity.

The Portfolio Holder also queried the overall cost to be part of NEPO. The Assistant Director indicated that an initial payment of £20,000 was required but membership could lead to contract rebates of up to £50,000 so there were clear advantages to membership.

Decision

That the future development of a more detailed business case to provide greater clarity over the proposals based on the options provided in the report be noted

That the comments of the Portfolio Holder be forwarded to the Review Steering Group.

70. Single Status Agreement Appeals – Chief Personnel Officer

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on progress on appeals received

Issues for Consideration

The Chief Personnel Officer reported that 435 appeals had been received of varying priority. Administrative arrangements had been put in place and additional temporary resources allocated to assist with processing. The comments of Directors / Head teachers had been requested in respect of high priority appeals. An independent Chair, Ian Jones, had been appointed and Appeals Panel training had already taken place. The first Appeals panel was due to meet the following week with all high priority appeals scheduled for completion by the end of 2009.

Decision

That progress on appeals received be noted.

71. Viewpoint – Citizen's Panel Results – Assistant Chief Executive

Type of Decision

Non key

Purpose of Report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the results of the 29th phase of Viewpoint, Hartlepool Borough Council's citizen's panel, that was distributed in June 2009.

Issues for Consideration

The latest Viewpoint questionnaire covered; Summerhill Country Park; Perceptions of young people; Council meetings; Council owned public toilets and Emergency planning leaflet.

Key findings from the questionnaire were outlined in the report.

The Portfolio Holder expressed surprise that 71% preferred information on Council meetings to be publicised through the Hartlepool Mail, given their declining readership figures. The Principal Strategy and Research Officer felt it was often difficult for people to think of alternative forms of publicity. The Portfolio Holder also raised concerns that by asking people's views their expectations could be raised unrealistically. However the Principal Strategy and Research Officer felt that this could be countered by being straightforward and admitting that certain actions were not achievable.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated officers for another excellent piece of work. He asked that questions relating to the role of the Mayor and the role and expenses of Councillors be included in a future survey.

Decision

- I. That the results of the survey be noted
- II. That topics relating to the role, pay and expenses of all elected members be included in a future survey

72. 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

Minute 73 – Rockhaven, 36 Victoria Road - This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3)

Minute 74 – Seaton Carew Sports and Social Club - This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3)

Minute 75 – Manor Residents Community Resource Centre - This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3)

Minute 76 – Restrictive Covenants – Land adjoining 3A Milton Road,

Hartlepool; Land at Mainsforth Terrace; Land at Seaton Lane (Eden Self Drive Hire Site); Cromwell Street and Land at Sovereign Park - This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3)

73. Rockhaven, 36 Victoria Road *(para 3) – Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To update Portfolio Holder on recent developments.

Issues for Consideration

Detailed within the closed minutes.

Decision

Detailed within the closed minutes.

74. Seaton Carew Sports and Social Club *(para 3) – Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To update the Portfolio Holder on recent developments.

Issues for Consideration

Detailed within the closed minutes.

Decision

Detailed within the closed minutes

75. Manor Residents Community Resource Centre
(para 3) – Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management)

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To update the Portfolio Holder in connection with developments in respect of this property.

Issues for Consideration

Detailed within the closed minutes.

Decision

Detailed within the closed minutes.

76. Restrictive Covenants – Land Adjoining 3A Milton Road, Hartlepool; Land at Mainsforth Terrace; Land at Seaton Lane (Eden Self Drive Hire Site); Cromwell Street and Land at Sovereign Park *(para 3) – Assistant Director (Procurement and Asset Management)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

To update the Portfolio Holder in regard to a number of restrictive covenants.

Issues for Consideration

Detailed within the closed minutes.

Decision

Detailed within the closed minutes

The meeting concluded at 11.30am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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