

REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO

DECISION RECORD

26th March 2010

The meeting commenced at 2.30pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Pamela Hargreaves (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economic Development)

Officers: Mick Emerson, Principal Economic Development Officer (Business)
Rob Smith, Senior Regeneration Officer
Jo Wilson, Democratic Services Officer

14. Empty Shops Fund (*Assistant Director (Housing and Regeneration)*)

Type of decision

Non key

Purpose of report

To update the Portfolio Holder on the use of Empty Shop Fund Resources.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

Hartlepool had been identified as one of 57 local authorities to benefit from a £3 million Government fund to address problems of empty shops in town centres. The award was £52,631 and not ring fenced meaning it could be used at the discretion of the Council. Officers had previously identified a number of projects for the funding aimed at reducing the impact of vacant shop units within the town centre, including an expansion of the indoor market initiative, a Multi-Use Drop-in Unit at Middleton Grange Shopping Centre and smaller scale initiatives to improve the appearance of vacant shops. On 27th November 2009 the Portfolio Holder had agreed in principle to the Empty Shops Fund being used on these projects. Following this the initial ideas had been developed and match funding sought.

Detailed information on the proposals and their funding was provided within the report. £35,000 had been set aside from the Fund to support the Indoor Market initiative while £10,000 had been set aside for the Multi-Use Drop-

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In-Unit with additional match funding secured from the Arts Council and the Social Care Reform Grant Fund. A reserve fund of £7,631 had also been set aside to support other beneficial schemes that meet the criteria of reducing the impact of vacant shop units within the town centre.

The Portfolio Holder expressed serious reservations about the use of Empty Shop funding to make improvements to the image of vacant shop fronts in York Road. The Senior Regeneration Officer confirmed that the shop owners would not be required to contribute towards the improvements. The Portfolio Holder was not happy to agree to this use of the funding and felt the monies ought to remain in reserve. Officers referred to other areas where similar initiatives had taken place which had positive results in reducing the impact of vacant shops and the re-letting of empty shop units. The Portfolio Holder asked officers to undertake research on the impact in other areas. She would then reconsider the proposal based on the officer findings.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether the monies used to pay the owners of the Indoor Market for repairs to the electricity supply had been returned to the Council. The Principal Economic Officer advised that as the work was not fully complete payment had not been made. In response to concerns raised by the Portfolio Holder the Principal Economic Development Officer indicated that improvements would continue to be made to the Indoor Market, together with further works in respect of the Outdoor Market. £35,000 had been set aside for the Indoor Market, some of which had already been allocated. The plan was to bring the Indoor and Outdoor Markets together, utilising monies from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund to make this happen.

The Portfolio Holder praised all those who had been involved in the regeneration of the Indoor Market. Regarding the proposed Multi-Use Drop-In Unit she queried the staffing implications. The Senior Regeneration Officer advised that the costs for a manager and staff to run the premises were included within the project budget with no extra cost to the Council.

Decision

- I. That the progress of the projects identified within the report be noted
- II. That the use of the reserve funds from the vacant shop fund to contribute towards vacant shopfront visual improvements on York Road be deferred pending further information.

The meeting concluded at 3.00pm

P J DEVLIN
CHIEF SOLICITOR

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