

# **FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD**

3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006

**Present:**

Councillor Peter Jackson (Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Joanne Machers, Chief Personnel Services Officer  
Graham Frankland, Head of Procurement and Property Services  
Emma Dixon, Senior Estates Surveyor  
Edwin Jeffries, President of Hartlepool Trade Union Council  
John Morton, Assistant Chief Financial Officer (Audit, Revenues & Benefits)  
Joan Wilkins, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Officer

Also  
Present Councillor Victor Tumilty

## **57. Irrecoverable Debts – Benefits Overpayments** *(Chief Financial Officer)*

**Type of decision**

Non-key

**Purpose of report**

To seek approval to write-out a number of Housing and Council Tax Benefit overpayment debts, which are now, considered being irrecoverable.

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Financial Officer report that the Council's financial procedure rules provided that any debt due to the Council of £1000 or more could only be written-out with the express permission of the Portfolio Holder. On the basis of this, consideration was sought of a request to write-out a number of Housing and Council Tax Benefit overpayments to the value of £37,946.90. Details of the individual Benefit Overpayment debts over £1000, and the reasons why each debt remained unrecovered were outlined in a confidential appendix to the report.

An assurance was given that all debts submitted for write-out from the accounting records had been comprehensively scrutinised by officers. However, further recovery work would continue where possible with individual debts to be reinstated if payment was eventually received or further developments indicate a debt to later become recoverable. It was also noted that the Council's recovery rate was in the top quartile nationally and in instances where not recoverable individuals were tagged in terms of name and national insurance number to allow them to be identified if they were to make any further benefit claims.

In response to a query in relation to the level of debts written-out under £1000 it was confirmed that the figure was in the region of £80,000. Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder acknowledged the need for the capacity to write-out debts and indicated his support for the write-out of the debts put before him. He was, however, pleased to hear that recovery action would be reinstated should the opportunity arise.

### **Decision**

The write-out of debts to the value of £37,946.90 in respect of irrecoverable Housing and Council Tax Benefit Overpayments was approved.

## **58. Workers Memorial Day** (*Chief Personnel Services Officer*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To outline information in relation to, and seek consideration of, a request from the Hartlepool Joint Trade Union Committee regarding arrangements for the Workers Memorial Day on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Personnel Services Officer submitted a report from the Hartlepool Joint Trades Union Committee (HJTUC), within which details of the history and proposals for the Workers Memorial Day on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The President of the Hartlepool Trade Union Council indicated that HJTUC recognised the importance of the event and requested Portfolio Holder consideration of:

- a) A minutes silence at 12.30pm on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006 in remembrance of 'those workers who have lost their lives through industrial accidents or disease'.
- b) The lowering of flags on public buildings on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006.
- c) Authorisation for the sale of the Workers Memorial Day remembrance forget-me-not purple ribbons on Council premises to staff and public.

The Portfolio Holder was delighted to see support being displayed for workers and expressed support for the day and the proposed timetable of events. In addition to this the Portfolio Holder requested that as much publicity as possible be given to the event in order to raise the level of awareness, with an article to be placed in the next edition of Newline.

### **Decision**

The report was noted and authorisation given for:-

- a) A minutes silence at 12.30pm on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006 in remembrance of 'those workers who have lost their lives through industrial accidents or disease'.
- b) The lowering of flags on public buildings on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006.
- c) Authorisation for the sale of the Workers Memorial Day remembrance forget-me-not purple ribbons on Council premises to staff and public.

## **59. Member Development** (*Chief Personnel Services Officer*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-Key

### **Purpose of report**

To report on the 2005/06 Elected Member Development Programme and to outline the activities for 2006/07.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Personnel Services Officer submitted a report outlining the progress to date of the Member Development Programme, including the introduction of a Member Development Strategy, use of Personal Development Logs and delivery of the Training Programme. Details were also provided of the budget provision of the Programme and a summary of expenditure in 2005/6 provided along with proposals for the further development of the programme through:

- Induction. The extension of the induction programme to include a pre-election event to ensure that candidates standing for election are well informed about the role of an Elected Member.
- Personal Development Plans. In order to encourage completion of personal development plans and assess individual training requirements one to one interviews were to continue to be made available.
- The Training Programme. To continue to provide Member Development training programme based on both individual and corporate requirements. The training for employees was also to be publicised to Members to

encourage 'mixed' events, shared learning and efficient use of training and development resources.

- Awareness Raising. A notice board and suggestion box was to be placed in the Members room to advertise development activities, provide feedback and seek suggestions for continuous improvement.

There was also to be:

- One hour awareness sessions to include a tour of buildings and an introduction to key officers.
- Members were to participate in the Political Awareness course for officers to provide an overview of their role, to build officer/member relationships and increase awareness.
- Work was to progress in line with the principles of both Investors in People and the Charter for Members Development to ensure the programme was aligned with external accreditation.

To assist the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Tumilty, a member of the Member Development Group highlighted the importance of the Programme in improving the relationship between officers and Members and indicated that there had been nothing but support for the courses provided from those who had attended. It was disappointing that more Members had not taken the opportunity to access many of the support activities and resources.

Following consideration of the report and the views expressed by Councillor Tumilty the Portfolio Holder expressed his support for the future actions of the programme, as outlined in the report. The Portfolio Holder also requested that value of the work of the Member Development Group be recognised and officers and Members thanked for their work.

### **Decision**

The implementation of the actions outlined in the report for the future of the Elected Member Development programme was approved.

## **60. HR Accommodation** (*Chief Personnel Services Officer*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To outline proposals for a change of office location for the Human Resources (HR) Operations and Organisational Development sections of the HR Division and suggests a name for the new offices.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Personnel Services Officer submitted a report outlining details of current office accommodation for the HR Operations and Organisational Development sections and the essential need for close working arrangements if the best possible service was to be delivered.

With this in mind as part of the Accommodation Strategy, it had been agreed that the HR Operations, Organisational Development (Policy and Information), Organisational Development (Workforce Development and Diversity) and Operational Development (Job Evaluation) sections would be moved into the Middleton Grange offices, previously occupied by Housing Hartlepool. This would free up space in the Civic Centre and the Municipal Buildings and assist in the provision of 'joined-up' working and facilitate integration between the Occupational Health service and Employee wellbeing team.

It was anticipated that the move to the new offices would be completed by the end of April 2006 and consideration was sought of new name for the offices that would retain some of the buildings heritage whilst also providing a clearer focus as to its location. In view of this it was suggested that the offices be renamed to "Windsor Offices".

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder expressed his support for the proposed new name.

### **Decision**

The report was noted and the renaming of the offices to "Windsor Offices" approved.

## **61. HR Related Agreements** (*Chief Personnel Services Officer*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To obtain the endorsement of agreements reached with the Hartlepool Joint Trades Union Committee in respect of HR related matters and the extension of the Car Loan scheme to include Motor Cycles and Cycles.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Personnel Services Officer indicated that agreement was reached with Hartlepool Joint Trade Union Committee on 22 March 2006 in respect of the following and provided a summary of each of the agreements:

- Bank and Public Holiday Entitlement for Part Time Workers

- Amended Adoption and Fostering Leave Scheme
- Car, Motor Cycle and Cycle Allowance and Loan Scheme

In relation to the car loan scheme it was noted that the current scheme only provided loans for motor cars and proposals were outlined in the report for the extension of this scheme to include motor cycles and cycles. Should the Portfolio Holder agree to the extension of the scheme the Chief Financial Officer, in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution, would determine the terms of the extended scheme.

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder expressed his support for the agreements and the extension of the car loan scheme as suggested.

### **Decision**

- i) The agreements reached with the Hartlepool Trade Union Committee in respect of the following were endorsed:
  - Bank and Public Holiday Entitlement for Part Time Workers
  - Amended Adoption and Fostering Leave Scheme
  - Car, Motor Cycle and Cycle Allowance and Loan Scheme
- ii) The extension of the car loan scheme to include motor cycles and cycles was approved.

## **62. Employee Survey** (*Chief Personnel Services Officer*)

### **Type of decision**

### **Purpose of report**

To outline the results of the Employee Survey undertaken at the end of 2005 and seek endorsement of the actions proposed.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Personnel Services Officer submitted a report outlining the results of the third Employee Survey, undertaken at the end of 2005. Details of the structure and aims of the survey, an executive summary of its results and a draft Action Plan were appended to the report.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the draft Action Plan, along with the detailed results of the survey, had been presented to the local trade unions at the Single Table meeting held on 22 March 2006 and was to be considered by Corporate Management Team (CMT) at their Away Day. The draft was to be updated and refined to reflect any comments made and a more detailed report on the action plan presented to the Portfolio Holder in June 2006 meeting. In

the meantime, however, some actions in response to the survey and its findings had already been undertaken. Details of these were outlined in the report.

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder expressed support for the results of the survey and took the opportunity to highlight an issue of importance to staff around the provision of canteen facilities. This was to be explored further with officers outside the meeting and the Portfolio Holder asked that his thanks be conveyed to employees for participating in the survey.

### **Decision**

- i) The results of the Employee Survey were noted.
- ii) The actions taken to date and the draft action plan were endorsed.

## **63. Expansion of Heartbeat** *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

### **Type of decision**

For Information.

### **Purpose of report**

To outline plans to incorporate supplements into Heartbeat resulting in the expansion of the magazine from a 48 to a 64 page publication.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the history and process for the production of Heartbeat. Attention was drawn to the three key areas in which Heartbeat had grown and the positive results of the surveys carried out via the Viewpoint citizen's panel.

The Public Relations Officer highlighted the importance of the continued development and improvement of the publication and indicated that the Public Relations Team who co-ordinate the magazine had been exploring the possibility of incorporating 8-page supplements/features to add value. As a result of this a number of supplements/features were to appear in the magazine during the 06/07 financial year and details of these were outlined in the report.

It was also brought to the Portfolio Holders attention that the development of Heartbeat over time had achieved substantial savings and whilst the budget for Heartbeat in 1996 was £60,000 this had dropped to £6,335 for the production of four editions during 2006/07. However, the aim was to make Heartbeat a self-financing publication during 2006/7.

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder indicated that he felt Hartbeat was an example of a success story and was pleased to see it expand.

### **Decision**

The report was noted.

## **64. Pension Dispute – Proposed National Strike Action**

*(Chief Personnel Services Officer)*

### **Type of decision**

For Information

### **Purpose of report**

To brief the Portfolio Holder on the proposed national strike action by the trade unions and the Council's response

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Chief Personnel Services Officer reported that following overwhelming support from Trade Union members in a ballot formal notification was received of a national day of strike action on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2006. The Council endeavoured to ensure that services were maintained where it was safe and appropriate to do and ensure that the day of action was trouble-free with no longer-term industrial relations legacy.

The Chief Personnel Services Officer confirmed that the day of action had gone smoothly and that efforts were being made to plan for the next potential day of action. It was noted that a protocol and a number of limited exemptions had been agreed with the trade union and that the issue of pay deductions was now being dealt with.

It was expected that the next day of action affecting Hartlepool would be on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Further 'potential' days for consideration had been indicated by AMICUS as the 3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> May.

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder indicated that he was thankful that a sensible approach had been adopted in Hartlepool and highlighted that Westminster had brought about this unfortunate situation.

### **Decision**

The report was noted.



## 65. Local Government Access to Information

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs referred to 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 66 – 68 Warren Road, Hartlepool – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3).

Minute 67 – Proposed Lease – 20 Newburn Bridge Industrial Estate – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3)

Minute 68 – Recovery of Rent Arrears 5 and 12 Newburn Bridge Industrial Estate Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3)

Minute 69 – Land at Rear of 17 Middlegate – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3)

Minute 70 - Internal Adaptations to Jesmond Road Primary School – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3)

## 66. 68 Warren Road, Hartlepool (*Head of Procurement and Property Services*) (Para 3)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To seek approval to vary a restrictive covenant.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

Details of discussions are set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**Decision**

Details of the decision is set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**67. Proposed Lease – 20 Newburn Bridge Industrial Estate**  
(*Head of Procurement and Property Services*) (Para 3)

**Type of decision**

Non-key

**Purpose of report**

To seek approval to a Lease at 20 Newburn Bridge Industrial Estate, which was outside of delegated powers.

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

Details of discussions are set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**Decision**

Details of the decision is set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**68. Recovery of Rent Arrears 5 and 12 Newburn Bridge Industrial Estate** (*Head of Procurement and Property Services*) (Para 3)

**Type of decision**

Non-key

**Purpose of report**

To outline action currently being taken against a tenant.

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

Details of discussions are set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**Decision**

Details of the decision is set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**69. Land at Rear of 17 Middlegate** (*Head of Procurement and Property Services*) (Para 3)

**Type of decision**

**Purpose of report**

To seek views on the way forward in relation to an area of Council owned land between 17 Middlegate and the Borough Hall, Hartlepool.

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

Details of discussions are set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**Decision**

Details of the decision is set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**70. Internal Adaptations to Jesmond Road Primary School** (*Head of Procurement and Property Services*) (PARA 3)

**Type of decision**

Non-key

**Purpose of report**

To seek consideration of a project being procured via the Councils Partnering arrangement for LEA, Corporate Planned Maintenance and Minor Building works.

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

Details of discussions are set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**Decision**

Details of the decision is set out in the 'Not for Publication' section of the decision record.

**The Portfolio Holder returned to open session for consideration of the remaining item on the agenda**

## **71. Asset Management Programme 2006/2007** *(Head of Procurement and Property Services)*

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To provide a position statements on the management of the Council's assets, to outlines plans for 2006/7 and seek approval for the proposed property maintenance programme for 2006/2007.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The Head of Procurement and Property Services highlighted the importance of asset management in achieving the Council's and the Community Strategy objectives. Contained within the report presented to the Portfolio Holder were details of:

- The Asset Management Plan (AMP) and the Capital Strategy,
- Capital and asset streams,
- Option appraisal,
- Maintenance backlog,
- Maintenance Programme 2006/7,
- Major barriers to access – Capital allocation,
- Derelict Council land and buildings, and
- Highway asset management.

Full details of each of these areas were outlined in the report with attention drawn to the financial implications of corporate planned maintenance proposals.

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder expressed support for all seven of the recommendations outlined in the report, with particular attention drawn to recommendation six. The Portfolio Holder requested that the if there was to be an unexpected change to the order and value of proposed expenditure with the addition, or amendment, of a project the project be added to the list and not agreed until the Portfolio Holder has approved it. In order to facilitate this it was suggested that the list be to the Portfolio Holder on a quarterly basis for his approval of any changes.

### **Decision**

- i) Progress on and plans for the asset management plan / capital strategy including the approach to option appraisal were approved.
- ii) The approach to maintenance backlog, as outlined in Section 6 of the report, including the formalisation of a maintenance strategy was noted and approved.

- iii) The continued approach taken to the removal of major barriers to access to buildings open to the public was noted and approved.
- iv) The broad approach being taken to the removal of Shortcomings to improve performance of BVPI 156 was noted and approved.
- v) The proposed Corporate Planned Maintenance programme of work, as detailed in **Appendix 3** Table A of the report, was approved.
- vi) The Head of Procurement and Property Services was authorised to apply flexibility in the order and value of proposed expenditure to ensure maximised benefits from the budgets available with minimised service disruption. In instances when this occurs additional projects were to be added to the list and not agreed until the Portfolio Holder has approved them. In order to facilitate this the updated/amended list was to be presented to the Portfolio Holder on a quarterly basis for approval of any changes.
- vii) The problems highlighted in respect of derelict Council land and buildings, and the need to address these issues via the asset management plan / capital strategy, were noted.

**J A BROWN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

**PUBLICATION DATE: 19<sup>th</sup> April 2006**