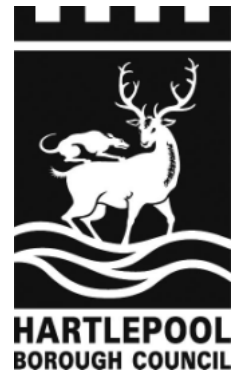


SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE AGENDA



Friday 3 June 2011

at 11.30 am

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Councillors Aiken, C Akers-Belcher, S Akers-Belcher, Barclay, Brash, Cook, Cranney, Fenwick, Fleet, Fleming, Gibbon, Griffin, Hall, Hargreaves, Hill, Ingham, Jackson, James, Lauderdale, Lawton, A E Lilley, G Lilley, Loynes, Maness, A Marshall, J Marshall, J W Marshall, McKenna, Dr. Morris, Payne, Preece, Richardson, Robinson, Rogan, Shaw, Shields, Simmons, Sirs, Sutheran, Tempest, Thomas, H Thompson, P Thompson, Turner, Wells, Wilcox and Wright.

Resident Representatives: Evelyn Leck and 2 vacancies

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2011 *(to follow)*
- 3.2 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2011 *(to follow)*

4. RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL TO REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

No items

5. **CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS FROM COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND NON EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

No items

6. **FORWARD PLAN**

No Items

7. **CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS / BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS**

No items

8. **CONSIDERATION OF FINANCIAL MONITORING/CORPORATE REPORTS**

No items

9. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

9.1 Feedback Report - Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's Response to the Referral in relation to Proposals for the Provision of the Revenues and Benefits Service - Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee (*to follow*)

9.2 Bus Services Working Group - Membership Update - Scrutiny Manager (*to follow*)

10. **CALL-IN REQUESTS**

No Items

11. **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT**

Date of Next Meeting - Friday, 24 June 2011 at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

12. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

EXEMPT ITEMS

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves 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) Act 1985

13. **EXEMPT ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

13.1 Jacksons Landing "Take Off" (Para 3) - Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods (*to follow*)

14. **ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT**

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

MINUTES

7 April 2011

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: James (In the Chair)

Councillors C Akers-Belcher, A Marshall, Preece, Richardson, Shaw, Simmons and Wells

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 (ii) Councillor Fleet was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Griffin

Also Present:

Councillor Hill, Children' Services Portfolio Holder
Andy Powell, Housing Hartlepool

Officers: Caroline O'Neill, Assistant Director, Child and Adult Services
John Mennear, Assitant Director, Child and Adult Services
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Ann Turner, Governor Support Officer
Gemma Day, Principal Regeneration Officer
Karen Kelly, Housing Strategy Officer
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Elaine Hind, Scrutiny Support Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

249. Any Other Items which the Chair Considers are Urgent

The Chair ruled that the following item of business (Minute 250) should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

250. Any Other Business – Call-In of Decision: Community Pool 2011/12 – Feedback from Working Group

The Chair reported that a meeting of the Working Group had taken place that day to consider how it would like to proceed in considering the Call-in of the decision of the Grants Committee taken on 1 March 2011 relating to the Community Pool.

The Chair provided feedback from the meeting and outlined the Working Group's recommendations to the Committee for consideration:-

- (i) The decisions taken by Grants Committee in relation to the following groups be agreed enabling the decision to be enacted with immediate effect:-

Hartlepool Citizen's Advice Bureau
Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency
Owton Manor West Neighbourhood Watch and Residents Association

- (ii) Whilst the Working Group were satisfied that the process had been implemented correctly, in approving the above grants, a number of issues in relation to the grants process had been identified as part of the review of the grants criteria currently being undertaken, for consideration by the Grants Committee.
- (iii) In relation to the decision taken by Grants Committee in relation to the Hartlepool Credit Union, the Working Group were of the view that the decision had contravened the principles of decision making. The basis for this being that the Grants Committee had not been provided with vital details of a decision in relation to funding previously obtained by the group through the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Procurement and that this issue be referred back to Grants Committee for consideration.

Recommended

- (i) That the recommendations of the Working Group, be agreed.
- (ii) That the findings of the Working Group be submitted to an early meeting of Grants Committee to which the Chair and Vice-Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee be invited to attend.

251. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Akers-Belcher, Cook, Griffin, Thomas and Resident Representatives E Leck and L Shields.

252. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

253. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2011

The minutes were confirmed subject to amendment to the spelling of Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher's name.

254. Confirmation of the minutes of the meetings held on 25 March 2011

Confirmed.

255. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Reports of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

None.

256. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews from Council, Executive Members and Non Executive Members

None.

257. Forward Plan

None.

258. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

None.

259. Consideration of financial monitoring/corporate reports

None.

260. Call-in of Decision: Appointment of Local Authority Representatives to Serve on School Governing Bodies (specifically the decision taken in relation to Seaton Nursery) Briefing Note/Verbal Evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (*Scrutiny Manager*)

The Scrutiny Manager provided Members with the relevant information relating to the Call-In of the Appointment of Local Authority Representatives to Serve on School Governing Bodies (specifically the decision taken in relation to Seaton Carew Nursery School) by the Children's Services Portfolio Holder on 22 February 2011, in accordance with the Authority's Call-In procedure.

The decision taken was that "The Portfolio Holder approved the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee in respect of the appointment of Local Authority representatives governors to serve on school governing bodies with the exception of the recommendation for Seaton Carew Nursery School and approved that Councillor Hilary Thompson be appointed to the Governing Body of that nursery school"

An extract of the relevant minute together with the report considered by the Portfolio Holder was submitted. Following the submission of an appropriate call-in notice (submitted as an appendix to the report) the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, at its meeting on 11 March 2011, considered and accepted the notice.

Details of the next steps in the process were provided, as set out in the report.

The Committee were asked to consider whether the decision was taken in accordance with the principles of decision making (as outlined in section 13 of the Constitution).

Officers who had been involved in the preparation of the report and the Children's Services Portfolio Holder were in attendance at the meeting to answer any questions in relation to the decision.

In response to a request for clarification regarding the Portfolio Holder's reasons for the decision, the Portfolio Holder was of the view that the decision taken was the correct decision and highlighted that there had been a misunderstanding regarding Councillor Hilary Thompson's attendance at Seaton Nursery Governing Body meetings. Councillor Thompson had visited the nursery on several occasions. However, had not attended the Governing Body meetings. The Children's Services Portfolio Holder confirmed that the reason for appointing Councillor Hilary Thompson to this position was due to her involvement with the nursery and specialist interest

and experience in early year's education.

A Member referred to the background to Councillor Paul Thompson's application and queried why it was considered Councillor Paul Thompson would not be interested in this position. The Governor Support Officer provided details of the expressions of interest process together with the follow up action taken as a result of the decision of General Purposes Committee.

The Chair went on to provide details of the decision making process of the General Purposes Committee in relation to this issue.

Members expressed their disappointment that the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee in relation to this appointment had been disregarded, that the decision to overturn decisions of the General Purposes Committee was against previous practice, that the decision taken disregarded the right of a Seaton Carew Elected Member to represent his constituents and that the minutes of the Portfolio meeting did not reflect the reasons for the decision as outlined by the Portfolio Holder today.

A number of questions were raised regarding the purpose of Councillor Hilary Thompson's visits to the nursery, including dates of visits and whether the Seaton Ward Councillors were given the same opportunity to visit the nursery to which the Assistant Director agreed to explore with the Head Teacher and provide clarification in this regard.

In relation to the reasons for the call- in and the Committee's perception that the Portfolio Holder had either pre-determined the decision taken or that the decision was politically motivated, the Children's Services Portfolio did not support this view and expressed extreme concerns in relation to such suggestions.

Following further discussion, the Committee requested that the item be deferred pending receipt of information from the Head Teacher regarding the issues raised, as set out above.

Recommended

That the call-in be further considered at a future meeting of this Committee upon receipt of clarification from Seaton Nursery in relation to the queries raised, as set out above.

261. Progress Report – Council Assisted Scheme for the Provision of Household White Goods/Furniture *(Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning)*

As part of the Forum's investigation into Child Poverty and Financial Inclusion, reference was made to the potential benefits of a scheme, which facilitated the provision of household white goods/furniture to families, particularly those in receipt of benefits. The report provided details of the

research undertaken and options for the feasibility of the introduction of a Council assisted scheme for the provision of household white goods/furniture in Hartlepool. The report considered the various issues that needed to be considered and explored before moving forward with a scheme for Hartlepool, the principles for establishing a scheme, examples of established schemes that had been looked at in detail, feedback from a visit to Rotherham Council including a history and overview of furnished homes and Rotherham Furniture Solutions Scheme as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this type of scheme for Hartlepool.

The report included information on alternative schemes for household white goods only which operated for people regardless of tenure that the Council, Housing Hartlepool and other registered providers could signpost people to.

From the research that had been undertaken, two schemes with potential to operate in Hartlepool had been worked up for the provision of household white goods/furniture, one being to develop a partnership with Housing Hartlepool or develop and support a scheme with a locally based community/voluntary sector enterprise or a Community Interest Company, the advantages and disadvantages of which were provided as set out in the report.

A representative from Housing Hartlepool, who was in attendance at the meeting, provided details of the furnished letting scheme operated by Housing Hartlepool and issues identified with the current scheme, as set out in the report.

The Chair summarised the options available and highlighted the importance of furniture packages being accessible to all sectors of the community. The need for inclusion of voluntary sector organisations, including the Credit Union, in developing this scheme in terms of loan provision and the development of a furniture recycling project was emphasised. It was noted that further exploration of the options available, as set out in the report, presented minimal risk and it was therefore considered that the business plan process be further developed by the department.

Emphasis was also placed on the importance of ensuring safeguards were in place for vulnerable people signing up to the scheme. The Assistant Director stated that as part of the process, there was a need to come up with a recommended list of low cost providers as well as advice and guidance in relation to the most appropriate methods of funding the scheme. There was also an option to consider whether capital funding was appropriate to assist with funding the scheme.

Further discussion ensued on the importance of tackling poverty issues and ensuring the correct level of support was provided. In relation to what other issues should be considered in developing the business plan, Members made the following comments/views/suggestions:-

- (i) The need to consider the links between poverty issues, debt

- problems and volatile tenancies.
- (ii) The advantages of housing providers/providers of goods including within service level agreements methods of sustaining tenancies.
 - (iii) The benefits of utilising soft market testing in a number of different ways including utilising registered social landlords housing lists to survey individuals waiting for accommodation to feed into the process. With regard to the benefits of initiatives of this type, Members were advised that this initiative could be utilised to encourage take up of accommodation in hard to let areas.
 - (iv) The importance of ensuring local suppliers were considered in relation to the provision of goods/services.
 - (v) In relation to the proposed furniture recycling project, this was an opportunity to extend beyond provision of re-upholstery and refurbishment and develop training and skills in this area.
 - (vi) In terms of funding provision, this was an opportunity for the Council to explore the feasibility of providing financial support and more affordable credit with a view to generating income to invest in other services. The Assistant Director agreed to pursue this suggestion with the Chief Finance Officer.

Recommended

- (i) That the contents of the report and the comments of the Committee, be noted.
- (ii) That following consideration of the options outlined in the report, the Committee supported the development of a scheme, with a community/voluntary sector enterprise/CIC, for the provision of household white goods/furniture to families in Hartlepool.
- (iii) That in taking forward the development of a scheme as detailed in (ii) above, the development of a business case, including the options outlined in the report and other information requested by the Committee, be explored.
- (iv) That details of the business case be brought back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, prior to the submission of a full proposal to Cabinet.

262. Additional Information Requested During Consideration of the Chief Executive's Departmental Plan *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The report provided Members with additional information requested during consideration of the Chief Executive's Departmental Plan by this Committee on 25 February 2011.

Recommended

That the information given, be noted.

263. Call-In Requests

None

264. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chairman ruled that the following items of business should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

265. Any Other Business – Request for Funding to Support the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee Community Pool (Call-in) Working Group *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The Scrutiny Manager reported on a request for funding from the Dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Budget.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee Community Pool (Call-in) Working Group had requested approval for £14.00 to fund lunch for 4 Members of the Working Group given the short timescales involved in the call-in and proximity of the working group to the afternoon's meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, details of which were attached at Appendix 1 to the report, a copy of which was tabled at the meeting.

Recommended

That the request for funding totalling £14.00 from the Dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Budget, be approved.

266. Any Other Business – Call-in of Decision: Community Pool 2011/12 – Interim Payments to Groups *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The Committee had been informed of an additional item of business to be considered at the meeting relating to 'Call-in of Decision: Community Pool 2011/12 – Interim Payments to Groups'. The Scrutiny Manager reported that this item of business was withdrawn as feedback from the Working Group in this regard had been considered earlier in the meeting (minute 250 refers), superseding this issue.

Recommended

That the item be withdrawn.

The meeting concluded at 2.45 pm.

CHAIR

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

MINUTES

15 April 2011

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Marjorie James (In the Chair)

Councillors: Christopher Akers-Belcher, Kevin Cranney, Sheila Griffin, Ann Marshall, Jane Shaw, Chris Simmons, Stephen Thomas and Ray Wells.

Resident Representatives:
Linda Shields

Also Present:

Councillor Jonathan Brash, Portfolio Holder for Performance

Officers: Joanne Machers, Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer
Stuart Langston, Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Angela Hunter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

267. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Akers-Belcher, Rob Cook, Arthur Preece, Carl Richardson and resident representative Angie Wilcox.

268. Declarations of interest by Members

Councillors Sheila Griffin, Marjorie James, Jane Shaw and Chris Simmons declared personal interests in minute 283 and Councillor Kevin Cranney declared a personal interest in minute 287.

269. Minutes

None.

270. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Reports of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

None.

271. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews from Council, Executive Members and Non Executive Members

None.

272. Forward Plan

None.

273. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

None.

274. Consideration of financial monitoring/corporate reports

None.

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

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the previous item of business and the following items of business on the grounds that they involved 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 No 276 The Provision of Counselling Services for Employees of Hartlepool Borough Council (*Portfolio Holder for Performance*) This item contained 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).

276. The Provision of Counselling Services for Employees of Hartlepool Borough Council *(Portfolio Holder for Performance)*

As a result of a Call-In Notice considered by Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 27 August 2010, the Portfolio Holder for Performance presented a report which informed the Committee of the outcome of the tender process relating to the provision of counselling services for Hartlepool Borough Council employees.

The Portfolio Holder presented the projected costs associated with the new contract. This item contained 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). It was noted that this contract had been secured through a joint tendering process with Middlesbrough Borough Council and had been awarded to Hartlepool MIND.

Generally Members were pleased with the success of the joint tendering process and the cost savings identified. However, there were some concerns that the reduced cost would result in reduced quality of service. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the tendering process sought 60:40 in relation to quality:cost to ensure that the contract was weighted towards quality. In addition, Members were asked to note the stability securing this contract had provided to a local provider.

Recommended

The report was noted.

The meeting returned to open session.

277. Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum – Progress Report *(Chair of the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The report provided an update on the work undertaken to date by the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum since the start of the 2010/11 municipal year.

The Chair highlighted that at the meeting of the Forum on 28 February 2011, it was recommended that consideration be given to inviting back bench Members to be part of the Teeswide Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Board. In addition, Members were encouraged to visit care homes within their wards to enable the residents to fulfil their right to meet the elected representative Member for their ward.

Recommended

That the report was noted.

278. Children's Services Scrutiny Forum – Progress Report *(Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The report provided an update on the work undertaken to date by the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum since the start of the 2010/11 municipal year.

Recommended

That the report was noted.

279. Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum – Progress Report *(Chair of Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The report provided an update on the work undertaken to date by the Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum since the start of the 2010/11 municipal year.

The Chair highlighted the investigations into the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and Services Available to Male Victims of Domestic Violence as being the most informative investigations undertaken during the year.

In relation to the investigation into Services Available to Male Victims of Domestic Violence, the Chair of the Committee suggested that the final report from this investigation be submitted to the Crime and Community Safety Partnership, the Chief Constable and Chief Inspector (Hartlepool Division) of Cleveland Police to generate discussion around these areas and a way forward for policing this issue. In addition, it was suggested that representatives from the Women's Refuge be contacted with a view to discussing the issue of support for male victims of abuse. The Portfolio Holder commented that the wider issue of alcohol misuse should also be considered as one of the causes and effect of abuse and it was suggested that the final report be circulated to the local health service as there was a clear link with the lack of provision re treatment for alcohol abuse.

Recommended

That the report was noted.

280. Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee – Progress Report (Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee)

The report provided an update on the work undertaken to date by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee since the start of the 2010/11 municipal year. The Chair of the Committee commended everyone who had contributed to the work undertaken by the Committee to achieve some significant outcomes. Thanks were also passed onto the Members, the Scrutiny Team and resident representatives for their valuable contributions.

In relation to the consideration of the budget proposals for 2012/13, the Chair suggested that the process implemented in previous years, whereby consideration of departmental budgets are broken down and submitted to the relevant Scrutiny Forums, would be repeated in 2011/12. Members were of the view that this was the most appropriate course of action and felt that whilst the process implemented in 2010/11 had enabled consideration of budget proposals within an extremely tight timescale, a return to the original process enabled more detailed consideration of the Executive's budget proposals.

Consideration was also given to the identification of the scrutiny work programme for 2011/12 and support expressed for the revision of the process implemented in previous years. As part of the revised process, it was agreed that rather than each Forum independently identifying their own work programmes, for approval by the Co-ordinating Committee, work programmes across all Forums would be discussed and identified by the Co-ordinating Committee at one meeting (to which all Scrutiny Members would be invited). It was felt that this process would be the most effective use of Scrutiny Members time and enable full co-ordination of the work programme, with a clear focus throughout the year on Scrutiny involvement in the exploration of the Councils challenging budgetary issues for 2012/13.

Recommended

- (i) That the report was noted.
- (ii) That in considering the Executive's budget proposals for 2012/13, the Scrutiny process implemented in 2010/11 be reintroduced, enabling departmental budgets to be broken down and considered in detail by each relevant Scrutiny Forum.
- (iii) That the process for the identification of the scrutiny work programme for 2011/12 be revised to enable work programmes across all Forums to be discussed and approved by the Co-ordinating Committee at one meeting (to which all Scrutiny Members are to be invited).

281. Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum – Progress Report *(Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The report provided an update on the work undertaken to date by the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum since the start of the 2010/11 municipal year.

Recommended

That the report was noted.

282. Health Scrutiny Forum *(Chair of Health Scrutiny Forum)*

The report provided an update on the work undertaken to date by the Health Scrutiny Forum since the start of the 2010/11 municipal year.

Recommended

That the report was noted.

283. Draft Final Report – The Provision of Face to Face Financial Advice and Information Services in Hartlepool *(Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee)*

The Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee moved the draft report setting out the findings of the Committee following its investigation into the Provision of Face to Face Financial Advice and Information Services in Hartlepool.

A Member suggested that ensuring all organisations achieve the national kitemark matrix accreditation which would ensure that the most appropriate and correct advice was being provided should be included within the recommendations. In relation to this, it was also suggested that during its consideration of the community pool, Cabinet be asked to consider the provision of financial assistance on a scaled approach to enable local groups to achieve this accreditation. Members requested that Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee expect to play a key role in establishing the criteria for the community pool.

During the discussions that followed the following points were raised:

- (i) Members were concerned at the length of waiting time for people to receive financial advice as it was noted that over 70% of people had to wait more than 10 day for an appointment and this should be

minimised. It was noted that this was partly due to the low number of financial advisors available and it was suggested that the Council should support organisations to train more people to be able to provide financial advice and assistance. The importance of having an emergency system in place to ensure that people can receive advice within a couple of days was stressed.

- (ii) In relation to recommendation (f), a Member suggested that the views of the young people who attend the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum be sought to ascertain the best way of delivering this service to young people. One of the key ways of getting the message across to young people was to ensure this provision was given to primary aged children to continue the work being undertaken in Children's Centres.
- (iii) It was noted that Government funding was provided to Citizen's Advice Bureaus across the country to be disseminated across other local organisations and it was noted that discussions need to be held with the local CAB to ensure that national funding was accessible by local organisations for the benefit of the residents of the town possibly through the creation of an IAG to appropriately monitor and compare the delivery of services across all organisations without increasing the burden of bureaucracy.
- (iv) It was suggested that recommendation (b) be broadened to including information from Council/other partners, including the community pool.

Members agreed that the recommendations be amended to include the comments above and that the Chair be given authority to agree the final report for submission to Cabinet in conjunction with the Scrutiny Manager.

Recommended

The report was noted and the final report to be agreed with the Chair in conjunction with the Scrutiny Manager.

284. Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The Scrutiny Manager circulated draft copies of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 for the Committee's consideration. The Annual report included summaries of the work of each of the scrutiny committees which had been drafted by the individual Chair's in consultation with the Scrutiny Team.

A Member commented that the picture included on page 11 of the 'Time to Escape' poster had not been well received by the Scrutiny Forum and Members had indicated that the reason behind the poster was not clear. The Scrutiny Manager confirmed that a footnote to that effect could be included within the page.

It was suggested that a new photograph of the Members of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee be taken at the next meeting and inserted into the

report. A Member commented on the photograph on pages 4 and 5 and suggested it be replaced with pictures from the Council's website.

Recommended

That the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 be approved for publication.

285. Final Report – Adult Safeguarding *(Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The final report setting out the findings of the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into 'Adult Safeguarding' was presented to the Committee.

Recommended

That the recommendations of the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into Adult Safeguarding, as set out below, be approved and forwarded to the Executive:

- (a) That a dialogue regarding budget and service cuts is maintained between members of the Hartlepool Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee to ensure that:-
 - (i) cuts to services are not taken in isolation, without consideration for the impact on partner agencies;
 - (ii) scarce resources are managed as effectively and efficiently as possible between agencies.
- (b) That the Primary Care Trust (or its equivalent replacement body) is encouraged to put forward a GP representative to sit on the Hartlepool Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee;
- (c) That the potential to recommence visits to care homes by Elected Members of the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum is included in the contract negotiations to be undertaken with providers;
- (d) That the feasibility of including an Elected Member from the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum on to the membership of the Hartlepool Adult Protection Committee is explored;
- (e) That the Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Forum be kept up to date on the provision of Adult Services in the town through the receipt of relevant aspects of the regular updates received by the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Public Health Services;

- (f) The use of welfare notices is investigated with partner agencies;
- (g) That safeguarding workshops are delivered to groups within Hartlepool (with particular reference to the deaf community) and a review is undertaken of the accessibility of safeguarding services.

286. Final Report – Foreshore Management *(Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The final report setting out the findings of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into 'Foreshore Management' was presented to the Committee.

Recommended

That the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into Foreshore Management, as set out below, be approved and forwarded to the Executive:

- (a) That the Council co-ordinates its beach cleaning services with forthcoming public events in order to provide an improved public service;
- (b) That the Council works with local businesses / industry and developers to explore and encourage investment opportunities to assist in the future development and restoration of foreshore activities;
- (c) That the Headland and Seaton Carew paddling pools be kept open and work undertaken to identify the most cost effective means of dealing with ongoing maintenance issues;
- (d) That the Council fully consults with residents on any improvements which are to be made to sites along the foreshore and ensures that residents are kept up to date on the progress of the improvements;
- (e) That the Seaton Carew Residents Action Group is re-launched and the membership refreshed to provide a suitable forum to engage with local residents and business and encourage their input into the economic development of Seaton;
- (f) That, in marketing areas of interest to tourists along the foreshore, in addition to traditional attractions, increased emphasis should be placed upon the promotion of Hartlepool's natural assets (i.e. Saltholme and other sites of special scientific interest);
- (g) That the promotion of tourist attractions / events in Hartlepool should continue to be undertaken through traditional means, in addition to

web based approaches, in order to reach as wide an audience as possible;

- (h) That the Council provides guidance and support to local business and groups to access funding to improve the appearance of the foreshore;
- (i) That concerns regarding the lack of formal response(s) to residents reports of vehicular access to the beach via the Brus Tunnel, and nuisance on / damage to the beach and dunes, be relayed to Cleveland Police; and
- (j) That a permanent solution is explored to close the Brus Tunnel to vehicles, utilising funds obtained in relation to the vandalised camera on the site, giving consideration to:-
 - (i) Professional advice from Network Rail, Cleveland Police, CCTV operators and Council Officers; and
 - (ii) Views of local residents.

287. Final Report – Connected Care *(Health Scrutiny Forum)*

The final report setting out the findings of the Health Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into 'Connected Care' was presented to the Committee.

Recommended

That the recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into Foreshore Management, as set out below, be approved and forwarded to the Executive:

- (a) That a strategy is devised to identify those communities within Hartlepool who may benefit from the delivery of the Connected Care model;
- (b) That once recommendation (a) is completed, Connected Care is rolled-out to other communities in Hartlepool:-
 - (i) Ensuring that the necessary governance structure is in place;
 - (ii) Identifying the needs of the individual community from residents and ensuring the delivery of a bespoke service that covers any gaps in existing provision;
 - (iii) Ensuring that partnership arrangements are in place for current service providers and that duplication of work does not occur for those providers already delivering relevant services in that community; and

- (iv) That a feasibility study is carried out into support for the Connected Care roll-out through the transfer of staff and / or resources.
- (c) That following the completion of the work being undertaken by the LSE:-
 - (i) That the findings are shared with the Health Scrutiny Forum; and
 - (ii) That where evidence demonstrates the financial benefits of Connected Care, those organisations benefitting from early intervention by Connected Care, are invited to support or further support the Connected Care programme through resource allocation.
- (d) That in order to ensure the safety of Connected Care Navigators and as part of a multi-disciplinary approach to meeting the needs of individuals, that a feasibility study be undertaken into Navigators accessing Care First, Rio, Employee Protection Register and other related systems.

288. Final Report – Services Available to Male Victims of Domestic Abuse *(Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum)*

The final report setting out the findings of the Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into 'Services Available to Male Victims of Domestic Abuse' was presented to the Committee.

Recommended

That the recommendations of the Regeneration and Planning Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into Services Available to Male Victims of Domestic Abuse, as set out below, be approved and forwarded to the Executive:

- (a) That promotion of support and assistance available to male victims of domestic abuse is undertaken to encourage more male victims to engage with services, including:-
 - (i) Utilisation of appropriate promotional and awareness raising activities, highlighting services available to male victims of domestic abuse;
 - (ii) Ensuring that additional to recommendation (a)(i) information is made available to members of the public who are not able to access the internet.

- (b) That the provision of a helpline specifically for male victims of domestic abuse is investigated with the Safer Hartlepool Partnership;
- (c) That following the refresh of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership website a review of the Hartlepool Borough Council website is undertaken to assess whether:-
 - (i) The website contains sufficient information and signposts to enable male victims of domestic abuse to access services and contact appropriate support agencies;
 - (ii) Information can be accessed with limited searching.
- (d) That work is undertaken in conjunction with the Child and Adult Services Department to investigate the potential to deliver non gender specific domestic abuse prevention programmes at a school level.
- (e) That a work is undertaken with other local authorities in the northern region to consider:-
 - (i) Support for a cross authority male domestic abuse worker to develop and promote services available throughout the northern region;
 - (ii) Undertaking a cross authority review to determine the demand for a male refuge.

289. Regional Review of the Health of the Ex-Service Community – Final Report *(Health Scrutiny Forum)*

The final report setting out the findings of the North East Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its investigation into 'Regional Review of the Health of the Ex-Service Community' was presented to the Committee was presented to the Committee.

Recommended

The report was noted.

290. Dust Deposits on the Headland *(Health Scrutiny Forum)*

The report presented the findings of the Health Scrutiny Forum following its receipt of a report by the Executive Director of Public Health, NHS Tees entitled 'Health Profile of the Population Living on the Headland of Hartlepool'.

Recommended

The report was noted.

291. Six Monthly Monitoring of Agreed Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's Recommendations *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The Scrutiny Manager submitted the six monthly progress report on the delivery of the agreed scrutiny recommendations of this Committee and progress made by all Scrutiny investigations undertaken since 2005. Attached as Appendix A to the report was a summary of progress made by investigation and Appendix B provided a breakdown of progress made by the five standing Forums.

Recommended

That progress against the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's agreed recommendations, since the 2005/06 Municipal Year, be noted.

292. Call-In Requests

None.

293. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

Members wished their disappointment to be noted at the brief consideration given to Scrutiny Final reports when submitted to Cabinet. It was suggested that this concern may be discussed further at the forthcoming Joint Cabinet/Scrutiny event.

The meeting concluded at 3.54 pm

CHAIR

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

3 June 2011



Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

Subject: FEEDBACK REPORT - SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE'S RESPONSE TO THE REFERRAL IN RELATION TO PROPOSALS FOR THE PROVISION OF THE REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee with feedback on the outcome of Cabinet consideration of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's response to the referral in relation to proposals for the provision of the revenues and benefits service.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 As outlined within the Authority's Constitution, the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee has a mandatory obligation to consider referrals from Council, Cabinet and individual Cabinet Members within the timescale prescribed. (dependent upon origin of referral)
- 2.2 The Cabinet on the 24 January 2010 received a report in relation to the development of a proposed strategy for addressing the budget deficit from 2012/13 onwards, building on and continuing the Business Transformation programme in a revised structure. In discussing the report, Members explored in detail the recommendation that a procurement exercise should be undertaken for ICT and the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- 2.3 Cabinet Members drew attention to a decision taken earlier in the meeting regarding the findings of the Revenues & Benefits Service Delivery Review, in that further consideration needed to be given to alternative delivery models (including the Revenues and Benefits Service). It was subsequently agreed that consideration of the proposed procurement exercise for ICT and Revenues and Benefits Services should be deferred to a future meeting of Cabinet, to enable further exploration of potential alternative delivery models for the Revenues and Benefits Service.

- 2.4 In accordance with the request from Cabinet, a further report was submitted to the meeting on the 7 February 2011. Contained within the report was additional information in relation to the delivery of ICT and Revenues and Benefits services, including the potential benefits and risks of a number of options for the delivery of the services. The options identified in the report being the:
- Retention of Current Arrangements;
 - Creation of Shared Service model with another Local Authority;
 - Creation of shared service approach via a Regional Business Centre model with a Private Sector partner; and
 - Creation of a Joint Venture vehicle.
- 2.5 Taking into consideration the additional report / information provided, Cabinet considered again approval of a procurement exercise for ICT and Revenues and Benefits services, using the OGC Buying Solutions Framework. Cabinet did not feel able to make a decision at this time and it was agreed that proposals in relation to the provision of the Revenues and Benefits Service should be referred to Scrutiny for consideration.

3. CONSIDERATION OF THE REFERRAL

- 3.1 In accordance with the process for consideration of mandatory referrals from Cabinet, a meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee was convened on the 25 February 2011 to receive the referral and 'scope' the process for its consideration (including detailed written evidence). A further meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee was subsequently held on the 18 March 2011 which resulted in the formulation of a response to the referral. This response was considered by Cabinet on the 8 April 2011.
- 3.2 A copy of the report presented to Cabinet by the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee is attached at **Appendix A**. Following detailed consideration of this report, and verbal evidence / input from the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher, Cabinet concluded that:-
- 'The recommendations of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's review of the proposals for the provision of the revenues and benefits service, as referred by Cabinet on 7 February 2011, be noted and utilised to inform the process of the development of the strategy for bridging the budget deficit in the ICT and Revenues and Benefits services for 2011/12/13'
- 3.3 Full details of the decision, and discussions undertaken, are outlined in the minute extract attached at **Appendix B** (minute no. 211). The Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's recommendations went on to be taken into consideration by Cabinet during discussions in relation to proposals for a procurement route for ICT and Revenues and Benefits. Details of the outcome of these discussions and the decision taken are attached at **Appendix B** (minute no. 212).

- 3.4 In addition to the reports and extracts provided feedback will also be available at the meeting from the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 That Members receive feedback on the outcome of Cabinet consideration of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's response to the referral in relation to proposals for the provision of the revenues and benefits service.

**COUNCILLOR MARJORIE JAMES
CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:-

- i) Referral Response - Business Transformation Programme li - Proposals for the Provision of the Revenues and Benefits Service – Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee report to Cabinet – 8 April 2011.
- ii) Minutes for the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on the 25 Feb 2011 / 18 March and Cabinet on the 8 April.

CABINET

8 April 2011



Report of: Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

Subject: REFERRAL RESPONSE - BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME II - PROPOSALS FOR THE PROVISION OF THE REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To report the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's recommendations in relation to proposals for the provision of the revenues and benefits service, referred by Cabinet on 7 February 2011 to the Overview and Scrutiny Function.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Cabinet on the 24 January 2011 received a report in relation to the development of a proposed strategy for addressing the budget deficit from 2012/13 onwards, building on and continuing the Business Transformation programme in a revised structure. In discussing the report, Members explored in detail the recommendation that a procurement exercise should be undertaken for ICT and the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- 2.2 Cabinet Members drew attention to a decision taken earlier in the meeting regarding the findings of the Revenues & Benefits Service Delivery Review, in that further consideration needed to be given to alternative delivery models (including the Revenues and Benefits Service). It was subsequently agreed that consideration of the proposed procurement exercise for ICT and Revenues and Benefits Services should be deferred to a future meeting of Cabinet, to enable further exploration of potential alternative delivery models for the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- 2.3 In accordance with the request from Cabinet, a further report was submitted to the meeting on the 7 February 2011. Contained within the report was additional information in relation to the delivery of ICT and Revenues and Benefits services, including the potential benefits and risks of a number of options for the delivery of the services. The options identified in the report being the:

- Retention of Current Arrangements;
 - Creation of Shared Service model with another Local Authority;
 - Creation of shared service approach via a Regional Business Centre model with a Private Sector partner; and
 - Creation of a Joint Venture vehicle.
- 2.4 Taking into consideration the additional report / information provided, Cabinet reconsidered approval of a procurement exercise for ICT and Revenues and Benefits services, using the OGC Buying Solutions Framework. Cabinet did not feel able to make a decision at that time and it was agreed that proposals in relation to the provision of the Revenues and Benefits Service should be referred to Scrutiny for consideration.
- 2.5 In accordance with the process for consideration of mandatory referrals from Cabinet, a meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee was convened on the 25 February 2011 to receive the referral and 'scope' the process for its consideration (including detailed written evidence). A further meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee was subsequently held on the 18 March 2011, at which the Committee received the following evidence / information to assist in the formulation of its views, conclusions and recommendations (as set out in Sections 3 and 4 of this report):
- A detailed report from the Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer; and
 - Verbal evidence from the Performance Portfolio Holder, Assistant Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Finance and Customer Services Officer.
- 2.6 Copies of the documentation considered by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee at its meeting on the 18 March 2010 are available from the Scrutiny Manager should Cabinet Members wish to see it.

3 VIEWS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 In undertaking the referral, the Committee gave detailed consideration to the information provided (both written and verbal). Members were advised by the Performance Portfolio Holder, that Cabinet had considered potential option(s) for the provision of the Revenues and Benefits service on the following basis, and in making the referral had recognised the importance of Scrutiny involvement in the process:
- Future direction of the business transformation programme; and
 - Need to explore alternative ways of providing services to help meet the Councils budgetary difficulties.
- 3.2 The Committee recognised the severity of the financial situation in 2012/13 and welcomed the opportunity to, comment on the options for the delivery of

revenues and benefits services and, contribute to the formulation of a strategy to bridge the budget deficit.

- 3.3 Whilst the Committee expressed concern regarding the completeness of the information provided, it structured its views and conclusions on the referral around some of the fundamental questions utilised by Cabinet.

3.4 SHOULD THE SERVICE BE MAINTAINED AT ITS CURRENT LEVEL / WAY?

- 3.4.1 The Staffing Structure - Members looked in detail at the job descriptions and structures provided, and were concerned to discover that in addition to being incomplete, in many cases they had not been updated to reflect the outcome of the job evaluation and service delivery option processes. It was discovered that this was not solely a problem in the Revenues and Benefits service, it was in fact the situation across the Council and had been a result of the level of change / impact resulting from the job evaluation / SDO processes. Members were exceptionally dissatisfied with this situation and requested that:-

- i) The necessary updates to job descriptions and person specifications across all departments be completed by the 30 June 2011 and that details of those not meeting this deadline be reported back to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee; and
- ii) Fully updated job descriptions, person specifications and structures in relation to Revenues and Benefits service be brought back to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, as soon as possible after the 30 June 2011 deadline, for consideration in conjunction with the 6 monthly update on the monitoring of Scrutiny recommendations.

- 3.4.2 In relation to the revenues and benefits establishment, Members noted that it consists of 22 (band 7) FTE processing staff (not including the transferred staff detailed below), and that this equated to around £560,000 (or one third of the overall budget). Members were concerned that there appeared to be considerable waste on non processing activities / spending when resident's primary need was to see was their claims and queries dealt with as quickly as possible.

- 3.4.3 In looking at the staffing structure, Members were concerned regarding the apparently disproportionate number of posts Band 9 or above, given the need in the current economic climate to focus services on the provision of front line services and the Councils attempts to flatten structures. Members were also concerned regarding duplication of work and highlighted the potential for the creation of a small fully integrated financial inclusion team within the local authority's working arrangements (working from the Civic Centre), pulling together the activities of the following posts:-

- Financial Inclusion Partnership Officer / Partner Development Officer (Financial Inclusion Strategy);
- Community Engagement Officer;

- Recovery and Money Advice Liaison Officer; and
- Benefits Liaison Officer.

- 3.4.4 Attention was drawn to the importance of increasing the level of benefit take up and the role of face to face advice / partnership working in taking forward improvements. Members were aware that a fully mobile system had been used in previous years to improve processing speed and the take up of benefits, through the provision of outreach advice. It was noted that there had been problems with the wireless technology utilised by the mobile team this had resulted in the removal of the wider outreach service, leaving a reduced service which Members feel is very restrictive / difficult to access.
- 3.4.5 Members further discussed the issues of early intervention and the identification of 'alarm bells' when residents regular payment patterns started to slip. Concern was expressed that it took 3 missed payments before assistance was currently offered and that it is not until the summons stage that benefits and other systems are cross checked. Members felt that internal systems / technology should be capable of transmitting information in relation to problems and identifying potential solutions at the earliest opportunity. I.e. utilising the reports available from the IT system. The financial benefits to the Council of this, in facilitating interventions before the need for legal action, were very clear to the Committee.
- 3.4.6 In terms of early intervention, Members explored the content and way in which reminder letters are used and Members were of the view that an opportunity was being missed to highlight benefit eligibility and the availability of benefit / financial advice. Attention was also drawn to the huge potential for the provision of improved / developed services in partnership with the third sector, an example of this being the success of Connected Care in increasing benefit take-up.
- 3.4.7 Members looked in detail at the operation of recovery activities and discussed the implications of legislative changes to their operation / structure and the potential for income generation. In relation to fraud services, the Committee noted that legislative changes would mean that whilst fraud currently identified would remain the responsibility of the Council, in the future years this role would migrate to the DWP. In preparation for this, Members expressed concern that consideration needed to be given to the budget / staffing structure for the provision of counter fraud services over the next two years, in order to mitigate the potential to shed or TUPE staff to the DWP. In doing this, Members suggested that the service should operate with 2 investigating officers, with the vacant third post removed from the establishment. This would have a twofold benefit in preparing for the future, whilst also offering up a budgetary saving which could be utilised to either reduce the revenues and benefits 'administration' budget overspend or fund the provision of increased outreach services.
- 3.4.8 Members noted that the only statutory responsibility that Council has regarding counter fraud activity is to have processes in place in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.

- 3.4.9 In relation to the bailiffs services details of Members view and recommendations are outlined in Section 3.7.1 of the report.
- 3.4.10 In exploring the provision of Cash Office services, the Committee expressed concern regarding the potential reduction in opening hours and the negative impact it would have on this highly respected service. The potential of providing cash office services through post offices and shops was discussed, and whilst it was recognised that this could be explored as an option for the longer term, Members felt strongly that in the meantime a facility must continue to be provided in the Civic Centre. There was also concern that a reduction in opening hours could be confusing for residents and in particular the more vulnerable members of the community.
- 3.4.11 Looking further at how services could potentially continue to be provided without reducing hours, Members highlighted the potential for Cash Office staff to work alongside Revenues and Benefits staff, to undertake revenues and benefits work during quiet times. This suggestion was relayed to the Performance Portfolio Holder for consideration at his meeting on the 23 March 2011.
- 3.4.12 Internal Funding / Staffing Transfers – In exploring the allocation of the benefits budget, which consists of a benefit grant (£1,126m) and a recession payment (£113,357), Members drew attention to a number of instances where funding was transferred from the revenues and benefits staffing budget to other support services functions.
- 3.4.13 It was noted that £110,000 had been transferred into the Contact Centre for the provision of face to face customer services (utilised to fund the transfer of 4 revenues and benefits staff members, in addition to 2 further staff previously transferred). Emphasis was placed upon the multi-functional approach taken to the use of staff resources within the Contact Centre and whilst Members recognised the value of this approach, concern was expressed regarding the level of revenues and benefits advice/information and processing work being provided by the transferred staff. Members noted that the funding of the 2 earlier posts had been transferred from the revenues and benefits budget and that their focus was on the provision of wide ranging / general customer advice. In relation to the other transferred staff, it was suggested that given the amalgamation of duties, there should be some form of contribution to costs from other departmental budgets.
- 3.4.14 Emphasis was placed upon the need for parity between the £110,000 budget allocation and the intended purpose of the Benefit Grant.
- 3.4.15 Regarding the £161,000 of funding transferred to the Chief Executives Department support services budget, Members received clarification that these funds are being utilised for the provision of a central team to undertake all administrative tasks. This process was duplicated across the other Departments to reduce economies of scale.

3.4.16 Emphasis was also placed upon the need for parity between the £161,000 budget allocation and the intended purpose of the Benefit Grant.

3.4.17 In responding the Performance Portfolio Holders request for clarification as to Members view on the best way forward for the delivery of the Revenues and Benefits services in Hartlepool, the Committee indicated that:-

- i) It felt strongly that the best model for the provision of revenues and benefits services would be to reintroduce and expand the mobile outreach service, and that this would be imperative in meeting the future needs of residents. It was, however, recognised that the skills and knowledge of staff in relation to the benefits available would be critical in providing the advice needed, without the requirement for 3G mobile technology.

On a practical basis, it was suggested that the scripts previously used should be re-introduced, with the exclusion of wireless connectivity, and that staff utilise laptops and digital cameras/scanners to complete forms and verify documentation required to support applications.

- ii) The provision of outreach (face to face) services must be the way forward in the provision of revenues and benefits services, with reduced processing time and greater benefit take-up.
- iii) There is scope for genuine improvement in terms of the use of ICT systems to flag up breaks in regular payment patterns and enable early intervention through raised awareness of the availability of benefits and financial advice / information (as detailed in Section 3.4.4 above).
- iv) All reminder letters should include clear reference to benefit eligibility and the availability of benefit / financial advice (internally and externally). The Committee suggested a strap line of 'You may be entitled to benefit'.
- v) It is imperative to develop the full potential of working in partnership with the third sector to meet the existing and potential increases in demand for community based revenues and benefits services.
- vi) The budget / staffing structure for the provision of counter fraud services should be rationalised. The currently vacant Fraud Officer post should be deleted from the establishment and the saving identified utilised to either reduce the revenues and benefits 'administration' budget overspend or fund the provision of increased outreach services.
- vii) The creation of a small fully integrate financial inclusion team within the local authority's working arrangements should be explored, working from the Civic Centre and pulling together the activities of the posts identified above.

3.5 CAN WE CONTINUE TO DELIVER ALL SERVICES OURSELVES OR SHOULD WE INVESTIGATE OTHER MODELS OF DELIVERY?

3.5.1 On the basis of the evidence provided, the Committee strongly supported the retention of Revenues and Benefit services 'in house'. However, it was acknowledged that the service could be improved. Details of the areas for improvement and the Committees suggestions in terms of the way forward are outlined in Section 3.4.17 above.

3.5.2 Members are of the view that given the breadth and uncertainty of central government legislative changes over the next two years (including the potential transfer of revenues and benefits work to the DWP) it would be unwise to enter into a contract at this time. Members were also concerned that during the same time frame the internal IT contract would also need to be re-tendered and therefore felt that it was inappropriate to extend the Authorities reliance upon the current contractor.

3.5.3 Whilst the Committee did not support the OGC Buying Solutions option considered by Cabinet, Members were open to the identification of new ways of providing services and supportive of the potential for partnering arrangements with other Local Authorities as a way forward. This would, however, be with the proviso that Hartlepool Borough Council would be the primary service provider.

3.6 CAN WE IDENTIFY PLANS THAT WILL DELIVER THE DEGREE OF SAVINGS NEEDED?

3.6.1 In considering the referral, as previously indicated, the Committee was clear in its support for the retention of Revenues and Benefit services 'in house'. Members further agreed that Hartlepool should explore all opportunities to deliver Revenues and Benefits Services for other Local Authorities (with the proviso that Hartlepool Borough Council act as the lead provider)

3.6.2 Members are fully aware of the level and severity of savings required and identified a number of options, as outlined in this report. Whilst it is recognised that these savings will not reach the level identified within the proposal being considered by Cabinet, the Committee continues to feel strongly that the retention of the revenues and benefits service in house is the correct course of action.

3.6.3 The Committee recognises that with ever diminishing resources, there is a real need to ensure that services are prioritised appropriately, and the revenues and benefits service is in deed one of these high priority services. Members are also of the view that resources must be focused on front line services, with emphasis on the provision of ground / front line level staff and the 'flattening' of management structures.

3.7 CAN WE CHARGE FOR SOME SERVICES WHICH ARE CURRENTLY PROVIDED FREE, OR INCREASES EXISTING CHARGES?

3.7.1 During the course of discussions, attention was drawn to the income generated through Hartlepool's bailiff service and Members welcomed moves to expand the service, working in partnership with other local authorities. The Committee suggested that exploratory work should be undertaken to expand this joint working arrangement beyond the pilot programme with Darlington to include other local authorities across the Tees Valley and Durham County. In addition to this, it was suggested that:-

- i) Subject to the development of a business plan the viability of increasing the number of staff within the bailiff team / service should be explored, with the aim of increasing capacity for income generation; and
- ii) Any surplus income resulting from this should be reinvested in frontline services to support / expand the provision of face to face advice services.

4 RECOMMENDATION

4.1 The Committee wished to make recommendations that ensure the delivery of revenues and benefits services is accessible to all, including those with caring responsibilities, those who feel excluded and those who may need support. The service must reach out to all communities, recognising the need to address the take up of benefits as a central role for the Council in combating family poverty and deprivation. The revenues and benefits structure must also support the effective local networks that already exist, whilst developing the knowledge and skills of key stakeholders and partner organisations offering advice and guidance.

4.3 On this basis, it is recommended that the views and comments of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, as detailed in the report, be noted.

4.4 That in responding to the referral, the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee recommends to Cabinet that:-

- i) In relation to the options considered by Cabinet for the future provision of Revenues and Benefits services in Hartlepool, the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee:-
 - a) Supports fully the retention of Revenues and Benefit services 'in house';
 - b) Supports the exploration of a shared service / partnering model with another local authority, with the proviso that Hartlepool Borough Council act as the lead provider; and

- c) Rejects proposals for the creation of a joint venture vehicle or shared approach via a Regional Business Centre model with a Private Sector partner.

- ii) Given the level of uncertainty in relation to the detail / impact of the Governments welfare reform proposals, there is at this time a need to retain expertise in-house to enable the Council to respond to changes in the future;

- iii) The provision of bailiff services to other local authorities across the Tees Valley and Durham County be explored and that:-
 - a) Subject to the development of a business plan the viability of increasing the number of staff within the bailiff team / service should be explored, with the aim of increasing capacity for income generation; and
 - b) Any surplus income resulting from this be reinvested in frontline delivery to support / expand the provision of face to face advice services.

- iv) In supporting the retention of Revenues and Benefits services 'in house', the following significant service improvements would be necessary:-
 - a) That late payment letters / reminders should be non threatening and include clear reference to possible benefit eligibility and the availability of benefit / financial advice;
 - b) That in relation to Revenues and Benefits ICT:
 - The ability of the current ICT systems to be interrogated to provide greater sensitivity in the early identification of those residents facing / or already in financial difficulty should be explored; and
 - Utilising the 'early identification' information obtained, a process be put in place to ensure that residents in financial difficulty are referred to community based independent advice / information services prior to the commencement of any enforcement action.
 - c) In relation to the provision of mobile outreach / home support services:
 - The principle of the mobile outreach / mobile benefit team be reintroduced;
 - The reintroduction of outreach / home support services be delivered in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, as part of the roll out of Connected Care;

- In order to deliver the service on a collaborative basis, a protocol and service level agreement would need to be developed to facilitate the sharing of information with partners; and
 - The mobile technology previously utilised by the mobile benefit team be reused, with the exclusion of the 3G connectivity elements of the package which had been the basis of problems in the past.
- v) That in relation to the availability of job descriptions, person specifications and structures:-
- a) The Committee was exceptionally concerned to find that a number of job descriptions, person specifications and structures across the Council had not been updated following the job evaluation / SDO processes, and requested that all necessary updates be completed by the 30 June 2011 and details of those not meeting this deadline reported back to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee;
 - b) The Committee requested that fully updated job descriptions, person specifications and structures in relation to revenues and benefits service be brought back to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, as soon as possible after the 30 June 2011 deadline, for consideration in conjunction with the 6 monthly update on the monitoring of Scrutiny recommendations; and
 - c) The band / grade of Chief Officer posts be shown on all departmental structures.
- vi) That in terms of the revenues and benefits service staffing structure:-
- a) As part of the move towards greater efficiency, the disproportionate allocation of revenues and benefits posts above grade 9 should be addressed to enable resources to be focused on the provision of continued / improved front line processing services. This should be undertaken in conjunction with a review of the monies allocated to the Contact Centre and shared services ensuring resources equate to work undertaken in the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit.
 - b) A complete rationalisation of the budget / staffing structure for the provision of counter fraud services is needed to prepare for changes over the next two years and mitigate the future requirement to shed or TUPE staff to the DWP.
 - c) Given the need to rationalise the budget / staffing structure for the provision of counter fraud services, the currently vacant Fraud Officer post should be deleted from the establishment and the saving identified utilised to either reduce the revenues and benefits 'administration' budget overspend or fund the provision of increased outreach services.

- d) In order to fully integrate financial inclusion within the local authority's working arrangements, and remove duplication of activities across a number of posts, Members are of the opinion that some rationalisation and realignment of posts, as outlined in 3.4.3 will generate a more efficient service by creating an Inclusion Team operating from the Civic Centre.
- vii) That during consideration of options for the future operation of cash office services, the Performance Portfolio Holder be asked to explore the feasibility of Cash Office staff working alongside Revenues and Benefits staff, to undertake revenues and benefits work during quiet times, as a means of facilitating the retention of existing cash office services / opening hours.

COUNCILLOR MARJORIE JAMES
CHAIR OF SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee – 25 February 2011 - Report by Scrutiny Manager entitled 'Referral from Cabinet – Strategy for Bridging the Budget Deficit 2012/13 – Business Transformation Programme II'
- (ii) Cabinet 24 January 2011 - Report by the Chief Executive entitled 'Strategy for Bridging the Budget Deficit 2012/13 (Initial Report) – Business Transformation Programme II';
- (iii) Cabinet 7 February 2011 - Report by the Chief Executive Entitled 'Strategy for Bridging the Budget Deficit 2012/13 – Business Transformation Programme II (Follow Up Report)';
- (iv) Cabinet 7 February 2011 - Report by the Assistant Chief Finance and Customer Services Officer entitled 'Business Transformation - Revenues and Benefits Service Delivery Option Report'; and
- (v) Cabinet Minutes for the 24 January 2001 and 7 February 2011.

CABINET

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

8 April 2011

MINUTE EXTRACT

The meeting commenced at 8.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

The Mayor, Stuart Drummond - In the Chair

Councillors: Jonathan Brash (Performance Portfolio Holder)
Robbie Payne (Deputy Mayor) (Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holder),
Pam Hargreaves (Regeneration and Economic Development Portfolio Holder),
Gerard Hall (Adult and Public Health Services Portfolio Holder).
Cath Hill (Children's Services Portfolio Holder),
Hilary Thompson (Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder),

Also Present: Councillor Marjorie James, Chair of Scrutiny Coordinating Committee
Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher.

Officers: Paul Walker, Chief Executive
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Alyson Camen, Head of Legal services
Joanne Machers, Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer
Nicola Bailey, Director of Child and Adult Services
Dave Stubbs, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Denise Ogden, Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Services
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning
Graham Frankland, Assistant Director, Resources
Antony Steinberg, Economic Development Manager
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

211. Referral Response - Business Transformation Programme II - Proposals For The Provision Of The Revenues And Benefits Service *(Scrutiny Coordinating Committee)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To report the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's recommendations in relation to proposals for the provision of the revenues and benefits service, referred by Cabinet on 7 February 2011 to the Overview and Scrutiny Function.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

Cabinet on the 24 January 2011 received a report in relation to the development of a proposed strategy for addressing the budget deficit from 2012/13 onwards. Part of those discussions related to the future of the Revenues and Benefits service. A further report was considered on 7 February 2011 when Cabinet agreed that proposals in relation to the provision of the Revenues and Benefits Service should be referred to Scrutiny for consideration.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee presented the report of the Coordinating Committee's consideration of the referral and its recommendations. The Chair of Scrutiny Coordinating specifically thanked the Performance Portfolio Holder for his involvement in the investigation. The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee had addressed the four specific options highlighted in the report considered by Cabinet and the report based its response to addressing Scrutiny Members views on the following four questions –

Should the service be maintained at its current level / way?
Can we continue to deliver all services ourselves or should we investigate other models of delivery?
Can we identify plans that will deliver the degree of savings needed?
Can we charge for some services which are currently provided free, or increases existing charges?

The Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee outlined the discussions of Members and set out the Committees recommendations for Cabinet's consideration.

Cabinet focussed on several of the issues / comments made in the Scrutiny report. A Cabinet Member queried the Committee's comment that in moving staff from Revenues and Benefits (R&B) into the Contact Centre a greater level of budget than necessary, including funding allocated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had also been transferred. The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Chair commented that the R&B staff

9.1 Appendix B

transferred into the Contact Centre were not fully utilised in R&B work and were a 'hybrid' officer undertaking a wider range of duties than in their former role. The full salary of such staff should not therefore have been transferred from R&B as they were not fully tasked in such a role. There were also reports of visitors to the Contact Centre with benefit queries leaving without their queries being resolved as they could not see a dedicated R&B officer.

The Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer commented that the Contact Centre acted in central role for all departments and when staff were transferred in, the salary allocated to the post transferred at the same time.

The Mayor highlighted that the current service was a 'five star' service and he did not wish to see the level of service that the public received diminished. The next item on the agenda would be dealing with the issue of bridging the deficit for the ICT and Revenues and Benefits services. In relation to that issue the Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee commented that there was concern among Members that the current ICT contract was nearing its end and tying the two issues together could lead to a situation where the ICT contract review could effectively be bypassed. Cabinet Members commented that that was not the case as it would simply bring forward the retendering of the ICT contract, not bypass it.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee commented that while Scrutiny Members acknowledged the need to secure a different model of providing these services, privatising them was not the way forward. The Chief Executive highlighted that under the government's proposed new Universal Credit, Housing benefit would simply cease to exist. TUPE would not apply, as there would be no undertaking to transfer, therefore unfortunately, Housing Benefit staff would be made redundant. A Cabinet Member commented that no options could be ignored and if the most beneficial model was to utilise the private sector in doing what they did best married to what the council did best, then that had to be explored, as long as the Council went into such an arrangement in a strong position.

Cabinet went on to discuss the potential for a partner arrangement with another/other local authorities. A Cabinet Member suggested that there was potential for Hartlepool to bid for the provision of R&B services to other authorities that had already outsourced their services and where contracts were coming up for renewal. Concern was again expressed at the utilisation of the monies allocated by the DWP.

The Mayor commented that while there appeared to be no appetite presently for a joint venture arrangement, the option of shared services was one that had wider support. Cabinet Members considered that no option should be ruled out at present and all should be subject to further consideration. A Cabinet Member was still concerned at the tying together of the ICT and R&B contracts and considered that further discussion on this aspect was needed. Cabinet Members indicated that the extension of the ICT contract had brought significant savings and had been done in light of

all the options available. A report on the savings achieved was requested.

The Mayor thanked the Chair of Scrutiny Coordinating Committee for her attendance and presentation of the Scrutiny report. The recommendations would be utilised by Cabinet to inform the next stage of the process.

Decision

That the recommendations of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's review of the proposals for the provision of the revenues and benefits service, as referred by Cabinet on 7 February 2011, be noted and utilised to inform the process of the development of the strategy for bridging the budget deficit in the ICT and Revenues and Benefits services for 2011/12/13.

212. Strategy For Bridging The Budget Deficit 2012/13 – ICT and Revenues and Benefits (*Chief Executive*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To enable Cabinet to make a decision in respect of the proposed procurement route for ICT and Revenues and Benefits.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Mayor noted that many of the aspects of the issues raised in the report had been touched upon in the discussions on the previous report. A letter received from the Hartlepool Joint Trades Union Committee was tabled and noted by Cabinet.

The Mayor commented that there was a tight timescale involved in considering the future provision of these services therefore the options for the provision of the Benefits Service needed to be investigated further, but quickly.

- Retention of Current Arrangements;
- Creation of Shared Service model with another Local Authority;
- Creation of shared service approach via a Regional Business Centre model with a Private Sector partner; and
- Creation of a Joint Venture vehicle.

The Mayor considered that the option for a shared service model with another local authority for example could be addressed very quickly. Cabinet will seek a firm proposal for moving forward at the earliest opportunity. The Chief Executive clarified that the further considerations would include the recommendation in the report to commence a procurement exercise using the OGC Buying Solutions Framework. This

was agreed by Cabinet.

Decision

That further investigation of the following options be undertaken and reported back to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity taking account of the timescales required for identifying the future of the services in question and the recommendations of the Scrutiny investigation reported earlier in the meeting:

- (i) A procurement exercise is undertaken using the OGC Buying Solutions Framework for ICT and Revenues and Benefits services.
- (ii) Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's recommendations for Revenues and Benefits Services would be considered as part of whichever delivery option is chosen.
- (iii) Other local authorities be approached quickly about what opportunities there are for working together.
- (iv) Early stages of testing the market, as part of the procurement process, would be undertaken.
- (v) The options and implications of a joint venture vehicle be researched.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 15 APRIL 2011

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

3 June 2011



Report of: Scrutiny Manager

Subject: BUS SERVICES WORKING GROUP MEMBERSHIP
UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to reconfirm, or amend as appropriate, the membership of the Buses Services Working Group.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 During the 2010/11 Municipal Year the Bus Services Working Group was set up to review the provision of bus services affected as a result of 2010/11 budget cuts. The current membership of the Bus Services Working Group is as follows:-

Councillors: Cranney, Griffin, James, Preece, Simmons, Thomas and Wells.

- 2.2 Members will be aware that there is the potential for a change to the membership of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee at Annual Council, with a potential impact on the membership of the Bus Services Working Group. Given that the outcome of Annual Council was not known at the time of production of today's agenda, the purpose of this report is to give the Committee the opportunity, should it be required, to nominate replacement members to fill any potential vacancies on the Bus Services Working Group.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum:-

- (i) Reconfirm the membership of the Bus Services Working Group; or
- (ii) Nominate, and approve, replacement Members to fill potential vacancies following Annual Council.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

No additional papers were used in the preparation of this report.