

CABINET

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

1 AUGUST 2011

The meeting commenced at 9.15 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Robbie Payne (Deputy Mayor) - In the Chair

Councillors: Jonathan Brash (Performance 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),

Officers: Paul Walker, Chief Executive
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Dave Stubbs, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Caroline O'Neill, Assistant Director, Performance and Achievement
Louise Wallace, Assistant Director, Health Improvement
Hannah Watkins, National Management Trainee
Antony Steinberg, Economic Development Manager
Derek Gouldburn, Urban and Planning Policy Manager
Nigel Johnson, Housing Services Manager
Amy Waller, Principal Housing Regeneration Officer
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

49. Apologies for Absence

The Mayor, Stuart Drummond, Pam Hargreaves (Regeneration and Economic Development Portfolio Holder) and Peter Jackson (Cabinet Member without Portfolio).

50. Declarations of interest by Members

Councillor Hilary Thompson declared a private interest in Minute no. 55 "Empty Homes Pilot Scheme".

51. Inquorate Meeting

It was noted that the meeting was not quorate. The Deputy Mayor indicated that (as permitted under the Local Government Act 2000 and the

Constitution) he would exercise his powers of decision and that he would do so in accordance with the wishes of the Members present, indicated in the usual way. Each of the decisions set out in the decision record were confirmed by the Deputy Mayor accordingly.

52. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2011

Confirmed.

53. Housing Market Renewal Transition Fund (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Key Decision. Tests (i) and (ii) apply. Ref No. RN63/11

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet Members on the programme of funding available from Central Government through the Homes and Communities Agency.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report presented Cabinet with an update on the current position within the Carr/Hopps Street Housing Regeneration area and proposals for an exit strategy in line with the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Transition funding announced by Central Government. The report provided an outline of the bid and requests specific approval for the match funding elements required.

The Chief Financial Officer highlighted that there was no specific budget for any of the estimated costs set out in Appendix A to the report and as such it would be a departure from the budget and policy framework therefore requiring Council approval. The estimated costs of continuing the HMR programme in the Carr/Hopps Street area was £5.5m which could be phased over four years. The achievement of capital receipts, any S106 Agreements and potentially the new homes bonus may offset some of the borrowing costs but it was unlikely these would be achieved until later years.

Cabinet was concerned at the government withdrawing financial support yet again for another previously funded scheme. There was concern at the fall back position should the bid to the Transition fund fail. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods commented that the council would need to continue to fund this scheme through to completion. If the area was left, it would be blighted and the long run costs for the authority would probably be higher than completing the scheme. It was highlighted that the Tees Valley bid of £6.3m across the four borough council areas was a realistic application. A response on the bid was not, however expected until September.

Members were also concerned at the position of absent private landlords

benefitting from the process. Officers indicated that the council was still continuing the purchase of properties from vulnerable owner/occupiers in the area. Property values were generally still going down in the Carr/Hopps Street area – it was a blighted area. There was also no requirement under the government scheme to do anything with the area once it was cleared, it could be simply grassed over. However, there was potential in the future for developers to be attracted to the site as it had main road frontage which was attractive to them.

Cabinet supported the proposals and congratulated the officers for the work that was being undertaken on this scheme. Members considered that the pressure needed to be maintained on private landlords here and in other areas and that the message must be that the authority would use any of the tools available to it to deal with the properties they had neglected.

Decision

1. That subject to confirmation from the Homes and Communities Agency of a successful bid to the transition fund, the continuation of the Housing Market Renewal programme in the Carr/Hopps Street area be authorised.
2. That the proposal to match fund 50% of the capital costs of the scheme between £2,000,000 and £3,511,800 (the amount is dependant on the outcome of the bid and the level of private sector funding attained) be approved.
3. That a further report on financial modelling in respect of match funding be submitted to a future meeting of Cabinet prior to approval by full Council as a departure from the budget and policy framework..

54. Delivery of the Church Square Masterplan (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Key Decision; Test (i) applies. Ref: RN64/11

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the progress of the Church Square Masterplan and to enable Cabinet to seek Council approval to vire funding for the delivery of the first phase of the scheme.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report outlined the background and context of the Church Square Masterplan and set out details of a proposed first phase of works including funding, consultation and delivery arrangements. A detailed report had been considered by the Regeneration and Economic Development Portfolio Holder on the 22nd July 2011. The report detailed the same information for Cabinet's consideration and sought approval for the funding of the project from the Council's Unsupported Prudential Borrowing Programme and the Major Regeneration Projects revenue budget.

Church Square was one of the most important public spaces within the town centre. The area is undergoing a transformational change, which was being driven by a number of strategic projects. The largest of these schemes was the £51m+ redevelopment of Hartlepool College of Further Education. Cleveland College of Art and Design was also currently undertaking a comprehensive expansion of their Hartlepool campus involving the acquisition and conversion of the Municipal, Leadbitter and Archive Buildings, in addition to the re-modelling of their existing Church Square premises. The resulting impact was that Cleveland College of Art and Design was now the principal user of Church Square, with College buildings located both in and around the Square. The associated increase in student numbers, partly as a result of the relocation of the College's Higher Education course provision to Hartlepool, will result in a greater pedestrian usage of the Square. A further project that highlights the increasing importance of Church Square is the recently completed, multi-million pound Hartlepool Transport Interchange.

Church Square currently presents a poor quality image and an environment that is not in keeping with the nature and aspirations of its new surroundings. The Regeneration and Economic Development Portfolio Holder endorsed the preparation of a masterplan for Church Square at the Portfolio meeting on the 21st May 2010. The masterplan has been developed by the Council's Building Consultancy Team with the aim of creating an "open-campus environment" and a key focal point for the town centre. The delivery of the masterplan has been divided into a number of phases to align with funding availability and deliverability.

Approval was sought to begin the public consultation exercise on the masterplan, seeking views on the first phase of work in particular. The consultation process will involve public "drop-in" sessions in the Christ Church Art Gallery where the plans will be on display, together further consultation with businesses and other users of Church Square. An initial consultation exercise has already taken place with businesses, the Art Gallery and College's so that their comments could be included within the draft designs.

A Cabinet Member questioned the implementation of this scheme at a time when the council was making significant cuts elsewhere, bus service support being one such area. Cabinet gave its support to the proposals indicating that it was still necessary for the council to be seen to be investing in the future of the town. Cabinet did hope that the colleges who would benefit most from the investment would be playing their part in the scheme. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods indicated that this was the case already as discussions with Hartlepool College of Further Education had already proved fruitful.

Cabinet did feel that it was essential that the messages contained within the consultation exercise in particular needed to be clear that this was one-off capital investment money and not something that could be diverted to supporting bus services for example.

Decision

1. That the report be noted and the proposed funding arrangements, as set out in section 7 of the report be approved.
2. That Council approval be sought to vire the uncommitted balance of the capital Major Regeneration Projects budget of £390,000 for the scheme.

55. Empty Homes Pilot Scheme (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Key Decision; tests (i) and (ii) apply. Forward Plan Reference RN59 /11

Purpose of report

To provide an overview of a proposed scheme to bring empty properties back into use and to seek approval to implement this scheme within Hartlepool in partnership with Housing Hartlepool (Vela Group).

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

Cabinet was requested to consider the proposed implementation of an empty homes pilot scheme funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) grant and from SCRAPT (already allocated for adjacent areas) to bring long term private empty homes back into use within Hartlepool. The report addressed the partnership delivery, funding, finance, letting and lease arrangements of the scheme including setting the targets of the number of properties to be brought back into use, property selection criteria and the level of local employment and training outputs to be delivered. In addition legal, financial, risk considerations and project delivery arrangements were set out. The scheme was a key incentive for owners of empty properties to bring them back into use and will be coupled with enforcement action if necessary.

Cabinet, while supporting the principle of the scheme questioned why this was a grant/loan scheme and not a loan scheme so that the money could, in the long term, be recovered. There had been criticism of such schemes in the past whereby private landlord could access funds to improve their homes. Officers indicated that the HCA had initially insisted on the scheme being a full-grant based scheme. It was highlighted that there were around 570 homes empty in Hartlepool for more than six months.

Members questioned if the local authority would be able to tender for any of the works to be undertaken in properties. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods commented that the council would be able to bid for works.

The Deputy Mayor considered that the council should have been utilising its powers to take control of empty properties owned by absent landlords, improve them and operate them for a number of years. Officers indicated that as with many of the powers they did have relating to private landlords,

implementation did take time. Significant work had been done to date and officers indicated that they did use the wide range of tools available to them when dealing with problem landlords.

Decision

1. That the report be noted and the proposal to use identified funds to implement the empty homes pilot scheme as described within the report be approved;
2. That the mechanisms for project delivery in partnership with Housing Hartlepool be established.
3. That the use of Opening Doors (or other suitable community enterprises) to implement some of the improvement works be approved.
4. That authority be delegated to the Community Safety and Housing Portfolio Holder to agree any minor changes that may be required to the scheme through the implementation stages.

56. Bridging the Budget Strategy – Business Transformation Projects *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

At Cabinet on 20th June 2011 it was agreed to abolish the Business Transformation Board. This report requested Cabinet to clarify their new requirements at the Portfolio holders request.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Performance Portfolio Holder reported that Cabinet had determined that alternative mechanisms be clearly outlined so that information that would have been dealt with by the BT board as part of the Programme was still available for detailed discussion by all parties.

The Programme encapsulated three key areas -

- (i) the continuation of a programme of review and change which encapsulates the Business Transformation SDOs with a series of planned reductions (primarily focussing on none statutory services and functions),
- (ii) a series of projects which enable the authority to either take opportunities which can potentially deliver significant savings (whilst protecting frontline services) or provide for greater service resilience,
- (iii) Looking longer term and considering options for the medium term.

In respect of (i) and (ii) above these were largely encompassed by the determination of the work programmes for Scrutiny. Scrutiny Committees met on Friday 24th June 2011 to determine their work programmes. In addition to already established work these were almost exclusively comprised of the projects identified by Directors as forming part of the

revised Business Transformation (savings) programme. These would therefore be considered by members of the appropriate Scrutiny Forum before coming forward to Cabinet

In respect of (iii) above the Council Working Group would need to consider how it best approached these issues.

The Hartlepool Joint Trade Unions Committee (HJTUC) had requested that an arrangement be established as below ;

HJTUC feel it is necessary to maintain tri-partite discussions at the highest level within the Authority and in the absence of agreement, on the retention of the Business Transformation Board, HJTUC would welcome discussion on the potential for meetings to be held with Cabinet / CMT (Directors) and HJTUC (Regional Officers ex-officio)".

It was the advice of officers that the established work programmes for Scrutiny means that we did not require all projects previously submitted to the BT Board to go to the Council working group.

It was reported that the Mayor had been in discussion with the Trades Unions with regards to regular meetings. Cabinet therefore considered that the Trades Union request was being considered by the Mayor.

Decision

That the reporting arrangements for projects be noted.

57. Planning Policy Update (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

This report updates members on the proposed timetable and associated issues relating to the development of the Core Strategy together with other emerging planning policy related matters.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report sets out the next steps and timetable relating to the development of the Core Strategy which aims to produce the Publication document for consultation in January 2012. The report highlighted a recent Government publication entitled 'Positive Planning: a new focus on driving sustainable development' which established a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The report outlined the implications of this for the development of the Core Strategy. In light of the revised timetable for the Core Strategy, the report advised of the requirement to update the Local Development Scheme, the document which set out the timetable and key milestones for the preparation of the main planning policy documents.

The Core Strategy must be backed up by a strong and up to date evidence base. Most of this was in place but there was a need to refresh the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and to consult on a draft Local Infrastructure Plan. The report set out details of, and sought approval to progress those pieces of work.

The report also provided information on two further planning policy issues, the intention to progress a master plan to support the mixed-use development of land at Wynyard and the opportunity for the Council to bid for funding for the establishment and enhancement of Nature Improvement Areas.

Decision

1. That the timetable for producing the Core Strategy Publication draft for consultation be approved.
2. That the proposed revision to the Local Development Scheme be approved.
3. That the proposed refresh of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment be approved.
4. That consideration of the draft Local Infrastructure Plan be deferred to the next meeting of Cabinet but that officers be authorised to commence the consultation process with key stakeholders and service providers.
5. That both the intention to progress a master plan for the Wynyard area and the opportunity to submit a bid for Nature Improvement Areas be noted.

58. Healthy Weight Strategy (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report was to inform cabinet of the proposed Healthy Weight Strategy for Hartlepool and to seek approval for the strategy.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Adult and Public Health Portfolio Holder gave a brief overview of the proposed Healthy Weight Strategy for Hartlepool. A copy of the full strategy was submitted as an appendix to the report. The Assistant Director, Health Improvement reported that the strategy was designed move away from tackling obesity and moving towards talking about health weight. This was a wide ranging, cross-departmental strategy. The Assistant Director highlighted the good work that was taking place in schools as an example of what could be achieved particularly with the increase in take-up of free school meals. The Assistant Director thanked Miss Hannah Watkins, National Management Trainee for her significant input into the strategy.

Cabinet Members welcomed the strategy document and particularly welcomed the work being undertaken to increase the take –up of free school meals by those families that were eligible. One Cabinet Member suggested that the strategy should be strengthened in that rather than highlighting the standards to external organisations, whenever such organisations received funding from the local authority through grants or contracts, they should be required to meet these standards.

The Deputy Mayor commented that the figures highlighted in the strategy were startling and that it did reveal the necessity for the NHS to invest more money in prevention. A 10% shift in spending on dealing with obesity issues towards prevention could make a much more significant contribution than treatment. The Adult and Public Health Portfolio Holder did feel that it was important to get the messages out to people without being patronising.

Decision

That the Healthy Weight Strategy be approved.

59. Partnership with Darlington Borough Council for Joint Head of HR role (Chief Executive)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To set out a proposal to enter into an agreement with Darlington Borough Council to share a post of Head of HR and the implications for the structure of the Chief Executive's Department.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Chief Executive reported on the background to the proposal, the principles of an agreement and the implications for the structure of his Department.

The Deputy Mayor suggested that with some members of Cabinet not being present and the meeting inquorate, consideration of the proposal be deferred to the next meeting of Cabinet.

Decision

That the matter be deferred for consideration at the next meeting of Cabinet.

The meeting concluded at 10.50 a.m.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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