

CABINET

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

7 NOVEMBER 2011

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

Present:

The Mayor, Stuart Drummond - In the Chair

Councillors: Jonathan Brash (Housing and Transition Portfolio Holder)
Robbie Payne (Deputy Mayor) (Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holder),
Gerard Hall (Adult and Public Health Services Portfolio Holder).
Peter Jackson (Regeneration and Economic Development and Skills Portfolio Holder),
Chris Simmons (Children's Services Portfolio Holder),
Hilary Thompson (Performance Portfolio Holder),

Officers: Nicola Bailey, Acting Chief Executive
Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive,
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Alyson Carman, Head of Legal Services
Dave Stubbs, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning
Graham Frankland, Assistant Director, Resources
Caroline O'Neill, Assistant Director, Performance and Achievement
Zoe Westley, Head of Social and Education Inclusion
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

138. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Pam Hargreaves (Transport and Neighbourhoods Portfolio Holder) and Cath Hill (Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder).

139. Declarations of interest by Members

Councillor Brash declared a non-prejudicial interest in minute no. 145.
Councillor declared a non-prejudicial interest in minute no. 145.
The Mayor, Stuart Drummond, and Deputy Mayor, Councillor Robbie Payne, declared non-prejudicial interests in minute no. 146.
The Mayor, Stuart Drummond, and Deputy Mayor, Councillor Robbie Payne, declared prejudicial interests in minute no. 150.

140. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2011

Confirmed.

141. Special Educational Needs (SEN) Pathfinder Programme *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

Key decision Test (i) applies. Forward Plan ref. CAS103/11.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to provide an outline of the SEN National Pathfinder Programme, to identify the implications for Hartlepool and to ask Cabinet to endorse the request by the Department for Education (DfE) to participate in the programme.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Assistant Director, Performance and Achievement reported that the Government's green paper, 'Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs', made wide ranging proposals to respond to the frustrations of children and young people, their families and professionals who work with them. A joint bid had been made by Hartlepool and Darlington Councils to become a Pathfinder authority and the Department for Education and the Department of Health had indicated that the authorities had been successful in joining the pathfinder programme for the provision of personal budgets, support to parents and young children and support to vulnerable children. The Programme would attract an income of up to £150,000 annually (pro rata) for 18 months starting part way through 2011-12, with a possibility of extending for a further two years (2013-14 and 2014-15). The funding would be shared between Hartlepool and Darlington.

In response to Members questions, the Head of Social and Education Inclusion indicated that clarification was still awaited on the funding arrangements. Cabinet was clear in its view that any additional staff engaged during the Pathfinder Programme would be time limited to the programme.

Cabinet welcomed the report and programme. The use of personal budgets with two young people was being trialled by the council and it was considered that this experience may have assisted in the bid's success. Cabinet noted that this authority was an early developer of the new health reforms and had established the shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and questioned if Darlington had also taken this step. Officers indicated that the programme award had a heavy emphasis on health issues and it may be necessary for Darlington to bring forward elements of these reforms.

Cabinet noted that the programme would lead to a services being

redesigned along a more holistic approach for service users and their families. Update reported would be submitted to Cabinet as further information / clarification was received from government.

Decision

That Cabinet endorses the request, by the Department for Education and Department of Health, to participate in the pathfinder programme.

142. Common Allocations Policy Review *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Key Decision, test (ii) applies. Forward Plan Reference: RN88/11.

Purpose of report

To update members on progress with implementing the approved changes to the Common Allocations Policy that governs the Tees Valley Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Housing and Transition Portfolio Holder reported that Cabinet had approved, in principle, the proposed amendments to the Common Allocations Policy, with the exception of;

- Removal of 'cumulative need', members have indicated that this should be kept for applicants in band 1 and 2.
- Restricting the priority banding to main householder only for those affected by regeneration schemes i.e. point 3) where it is proposed the existing policy be retained as a local variation applicable only for re-housing in Hartlepool.

Cabinet also agreed to delay implementation of these amendments until the outcome of the Government's proposals on social housing reform were known as further changes may be forthcoming and to reduce costs on any necessary IT amendments. The Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning indicated that the issues with IT systems were no longer a major concern and any amendments to systems could be undertaken at relatively low cost.

The Mayor was of the view that the reference to those in regeneration schemes should be retained particularly as regeneration of town centre areas was still ongoing.

There was concern that the numbers that could be affected under these changes were small and that the instances of cumulative need being applied would be low. The Assistant Director indicated that the IT system simply provided a calculation of points based on the information fed in. The implication was that someone could not be displaced from the top of a list if someone joined at a later stage but with greater cumulative need. It was an

issue of perception and much of the feedback did indicate that people found the systems confusing.

Members considered that the officers applying the system would be fully able to explain in the few occasions where people were displaced on the list due to others with greater cumulative need. No guarantees were ever given to people on the housing list but it did need to be as transparent as possible. Cabinet supported the retention of both elements within the allocations policy.

The Mayor asked for further details of the national policy announcement on applicants currently living outside the Borough wanting to return to Hartlepool.

Decision

1. That the implementation of the previously suggested policy amendments be not approved and that the principle of cumulative need be retained as a variation to the main Sub Regional Common Allocations Policy for Hartlepool.
2. That the implementation of the variation to the main Sub Regional Common Allocations Policy to restrict priority band 1+ to the main householder only for regeneration schemes be not applied in Hartlepool and that the existing policy be retained as previously agreed.

143. Property Related Services 2012/13 Savings *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Key Decision (test (i) applies). Forward Plan reference Number RN 91/11.

Purpose of report

To inform Cabinet of the proposals to achieve savings in Property Related Services to contribute to the Departmental Budget Savings for 2012 / 13.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holder reported on the proposals to achieve savings in the Property Related Services as part of the departmental budget savings for 2012/13. The areas of operation covered were Estates and Asset Management, Building Consultancy, Property Management, Carbon and Energy Management and the associated support services.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the range of statutory services carried out in these areas and also the fact that only some of the staff were centrally funded with a large income target from fee earning work. Therefore it could be difficult to reduce and defund budgets. The main proposals outlined within the report were –

- Combine technical teams to be more efficient to deal with reduced property and capital funding.
- Combining Construction Design and Management work with clerk of works duties.
- Enhancing areas to deal with regeneration projects and acquisition and disposal strategies while reducing resources and improving efficiencies in relation to property information and advice.
- Reduce support services through efficiencies in operation.
- Reduce the property maintenance budget
- Reduce the support services non pay budget.
- Reduce energy budgets as a result of energy saving measures.

The net savings of these proposals were estimated at £220,000. There were no risks highlighted in terms of sustainability of the services, though several of the proposals did require increased income targets. The impact on staff has been informally discussed with staff and trade union representatives and is currently being formally consulted upon. At the current time it was anticipated that five FTE posts would be affected. However, there were potential voluntary redundancy applications emerging which may assist in minimising the affect. An equality Impact Assessment was also included with the report.

Cabinet were concerned at the potential risk of not achieving the increased targets for income. Officers acknowledged that this was a particularly difficult area with so much being based on fee income and the position was monitored month by month. Service fees were competitive but it had to be acknowledged that the market was becoming extremely competitive as other authorities marketed their services to the private sector in the same way and others reduced the work they undertook year by year. Marketing of services need to be extended beyond the usual trade areas into the household market. The council brand would be strong but lessons did need to be learned on marketing. Members did feel that this could be extended to the services provided to schools.

Members did feel that the staff in these areas had excellent skills that should be more widely available to the public. The Public Relations Manger indicated that the services would be highlighted in the next issue of Hartbeat.

Decision

That the proposals for the achievement of £220,000 Savings as summarised in the report be approved.

Councillor Jackson left the meeting at this point.

144. Integrated Transport Unit and Highway, Traffic and

Transport 2012/13 Savings *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Key Decision (test (i) applies). Forward Plan reference Number RN97/11.

Purpose of report

To inform Cabinet of the full review of all services carried out within the Integrated Transport Unit and Highway, Traffic and Transport Sections.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported on the proposed options for the Integrated Transport Unit and Highway Traffic and Transport Service, located within the Transportation and Engineering Division. The Integrated Transport Unit included the Passenger Transport Service, the Fleet Service and the Road Safety Service. The Highways, Traffic and Transport Service included Traffic and Transport Planning, Parking Services, Asset Management and Highways Services.

The detailed proposals for savings were set out in appendix 1 to the report. Across the two areas, the savings were projected at £524,030. An equality Impact Assessment was also included with the report.

Cabinet was concerned that this was not the first time this area had been subject to cuts and there were specific concerns raised with the reduction in the gully cleansing service. The Director commented that all the proposals had been considered through scrutiny prior to this report to Cabinet. Gully cleansing had been increased to two teams only a few years ago and while the proposed reduction would reduce the service to a once a year cleaning rotation, not twice, the service would still be reactive, with the second machine retained for such eventualities.

The Director acknowledged that removing the bus shelter maintenance programme was a risk, however, if new shelters were required, they were provided under the agreement with Adshel. In response to Members questions, the Director indicated that the increase in income through road safety would be achieved through the Endor scheme which Hartlepool provided for the Tees Valley authorities and the Police to train drivers who had been caught speeding. Officers would look to extend the scheme if possible.

Cabinet was concerned that the cuts were now starting to affect service areas that the public would start to see.

Decision

That the proposals for the achievement of the £524,030 Savings which were summarised in the report be approved.

145. Hartlepool Housing Strategy 2011-2015 *(Director of*

Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)

Type of decision

Key Decision, tests (i) and (ii) apply. Forward Plan Reference Number RN60/11.

Purpose of report

Cabinet is asked to approve the Housing Strategy for 2011 to 2015 and the adoption of the Action Plan. The Strategy details the key housing priorities for the Council and its partners for the period to 2015. The Action Plan is the delivery plan for the priorities which have been identified.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Housing and Transition Portfolio Holder reported that the Housing Strategy for 2011 to 2015 reflected on what had been achieved since the 2006 to 2011 Housing Strategy had been developed and detailed the actions required for the next four years. It took into account the Housing Partnership's aim to "Ensure that there is access to good quality and affordable housing in sustainable neighbourhoods and communities where people want to live".

The strategy set out high level priority outcomes that had been developed using a robust evidence base and reflected the issues identified through consultation. To enable delivery of the strategy's objectives, the Council would work with a range of agencies and organisations. Strong relationships would be forged with the regulatory authority, the Homes and Communities Agency, to make best use of resources and best practice. Local residents' views would also be sought throughout the life of the strategy to measure whether the housing offer within Hartlepool was improved and met local needs.

The Portfolio Holder indicated that, subject to Cabinet approval, the strategy would be forwarded to Council for approval and adoption.

Cabinet welcomed the strategy and congratulated all those that had been involved in its development. It was noticeable that within the document the link between housing quality and health and education standards was drawn out. The Portfolio Holder indicated that the link between health and housing was undeniable but unfortunately not given enough significance within the NHS. 21% of all Hartlepool households were already in fuel poverty. Tackling the issue of poor housing could have a significant effect on health and lead to long term savings to the NHS.

It was commented that within the future housing needs identified within the report that the need to provide more bungalows within new developments wasn't reflected. Without an increase in the numbers of bungalows retired people were likely to remain in family homes after their children had left thus reducing the supply of such homes.

Cabinet also considered that the empty properties strategy needed to be maintained as a way of bringing affordable housing back into use. The Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning commented that the empty homes strategy was tackling empty homes within the town and there was the Baden Street pilot and also new government guidance on properties that had been empty more than two years.

Concern was also expressed at the provision of affordable housing in the borough through planning applications granted to private developers; this needed to be seen as a pre-requisite to planning approval, not an optional add-on. A housing strategy for young people leaving local authority care was also seen as a key issue and the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Transition and Children's Services indicated that they would wish to look at this area.

The Mayor indicated that the government was to announce shortly the provision of some money nationally to assist local authorities exiting regeneration projects.

The strategy was commended by the Mayor and he requested that Cabinet's thanks be passed on to the staff involved in its preparation. It highlighted the issues and complications that Hartlepool had to deal with to which members and officers were looking to tackle through new and innovative means. The Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning indicated that the Hartlepool strategy appeared to be seen as a model for other authorities who were now basing their own documents on the one before members today.

Decision

1. That the adoption and publication of the draft Housing Strategy 2011 - 2015 be approved.
2. That the associated Action Plan be approved and the Impact Assessment document noted.

146. Marketing of the Friarage Manor House Site *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to provide Cabinet with an update on the intention to secure the restoration and re-use of the Friarage Manor House on the Headland alongside the creation of a bespoke housing development on adjacent land and sought Cabinet's approval to the revised Friarage Manor House Planning Development Brief.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning reported that the Grade II Listed Friarage Manor House occupied part of a wider 0.8 hectare site owned in two separate ownerships by the Henry Smith Education Trust and the Henry Smith Non Education trust. For some time the Trusts had been working with Officers of the Council, and before that the North Hartlepool Partnership, to identify solutions that would achieve the restoration of the Manor House and the redevelopment of the wider site with a bespoke housing development. To secure this objective the two Trusts had recently agreed to jointly market their respective land ownerships to potential developers. Officers from Regeneration, Estates and Planning were providing support to facilitate this process.

The report went on to outline the revised development brief for the site and the marketing exercise that was to be undertaken. Whilst most of the support has been provided to the Trusts “in-kind” there would be a small cost associated with advertising and marketing the sites which had been estimated in the region of £3,000. The Trusts had limited resources available and would need to seek the approval of the Charities Commission to use their resources to fund expenditure of this nature. In order to deliver the regeneration of the site there may, therefore, be a need to provide Council funding through a loan facility, repayable upon sale of the land.

Members considered that the advertising costs were worth paying if it led to the restoration of the Manor House. There was concern that the sites had been marketed twice in the past with no success and in the current economic climate, the marketing was questioned. It was understood that the Trusts did need to relieve themselves of the liability of the Manor House and may even consider auctioning the building should a buyer not be found through marketing.

Decision

1. That the payment of £3,000 to fund the Marketing costs as reported be approved should the Trusts be unable to obtain the funding.
2. That the revised Planning Development Brief for the Friarage Manor House site and adjacent land be endorsed.

147. Medium Term Financial Strategy / Business Transformation *(Acting Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

This report is to enable Cabinet to consider options which may be available to the authority in respect of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and plans for addressing the budget deficit.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Acting Chief Executive reported that the nature and expectations on local government were constantly evolving no less so in a changing political context nationally. In order to effectively consider the range of options that may be available to assist in managing the balance between local priorities and the implications of nationally driven financial constraints Hartlepool and Darlington Councils had embarked on a feasibility study to evaluate the potential for strategic collaboration.

Both authorities face significant reductions in budgets over the next three years and on this basis, and to ensure that as part of these considerations there was appropriate “challenge”, funding from the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) had been secured to ensure independent and external support was available throughout the feasibility study.

It is important in considering the feasibility of change to be aware of both the drivers of this change but also the guiding principles which act as a guide at a locality level. In outline these included;

- Each Local authority to retain their individual identity and sovereignty
- Collaboration is not limited to Darlington and Hartlepool
- The authorities enter this process with a positive view of collaboration
- Collaboration must deliver demonstrable additional benefits to working separately.

There were a number of key challenges that needed to be taken into account in determining any such collaboration model and these would need to be considered and planned for as part of any next stage should this be agreed and these are detailed in the main report.

The evaluation study identifies that the potential for strategic collaboration is a real option and offers the potential to significantly reduce the cost base of the two local authorities (whether this collaboration was with each other or with other authorities) but it is not, nor was it ever intended to be, a fully established business case.

It was important to note that the work that had been undertaken to date had been in establishing the potential for collaboration, the extent to which this potential may deliver savings and, at the same time, provide protection to front line services by avoiding reductions in front line provision.

The initial feasibility study had identified that the potential scale of the opportunity (subject to detailed business cases and due diligence) was between £5.3m and £8.4m but that these were estimates at this stage and required further more detailed work.

The report considered the strategic and operational issues in respect of

- Child and Adult Services
- Corporate Services
- Culture and Leisure Services
- Environmental Services
- Regeneration, Policy, Planning and Infrastructure

The exploration of the opportunities for collaboration had inherent in it a number of issues which required addressing and considering at the outset. Such considerations do not impact on the ability to determine a business case for specific areas of activity but were important to address and understand to ensure that the best interest of the authority were protected and managed. These included;

- Governance and accountability
- Finance
- Legal and Human resources considerations

The work to date had identified that there was significant potential from investigating in detail the options available through the preparation of full business cases as detailed in the report. The scale of the opportunity was such, when allied with the need to ensure that there was sufficient capacity and expertise to deliver on them, that to ensure there were resources available to deliver on them was critical if there was to be progress to support the MTFS for 2013/14.

The preparation of a detailed business case based on previous experience was likely to take up to twelve months and could involve the secondment of key staff to work on the project, the requirement for external professional and technical advice and support and advice to develop appropriate governance models and ways of working. There would be significant involvement of HR, finance and legal teams as well as employees across the authority.

The initial feasibility work had been funded through an application to the REIP. It was proposed that a bid for funding the development of the detailed business cases be submitted to access RIEP funding to a maximum value of £75,000. Should such a bid not be successful the potential benefits from the collaboration identified in this report were significant and on this basis it would be proposed that the funding to support this come from Social Care Reform Grant. The funding would be used to cover potential costs associated with the purchase of advice and support and to cover temporary staffing costs for those employees seconded to the project

From the detailed information provided within the report, the Acting Chief Executive indicated that the following was proposed :-

- That the authorities take a phased and staged approach to the consideration, and determination, of more detailed and robust business cases for collaboration across the range of services identified including issues in respect of governance, accountability, resourcing and the financial benefits from collaboration
- the implementation and ongoing review of a roadmap for collaboration over the next three years
- the prioritisation of the service areas identified commencing with detailed business case and benefits plan for Child and Adult Services for consideration by Cabinet prior to progression

The proposed phased approach to this work was set out within the report.

Cabinet members requested a detailed breakdown of how the £75,000 REIP funding would be spent, if it was obtained. If not, Cabinet questioned if there were other avenues for funding the work other than the Social Care Grant. The Acting Chief Executive indicated that the spend may be used to support back-filling those involved in the detailed work and any external technical or legal advice. There was some concern at the time that senior staff could be involved in this process when the senior management team was already stretched.

The Acting Chief Executive commented that at present the ICT issues that could affect joint working were unknown. The two authorities did work in differing ways and work would identify how we could use the expertise in both authorities to ensure the most effective and efficient ways of working were implemented.

The Mayor commented that the two management teams would obviously be concerned and asking similar questions. The results of some of this work may lead to some roles changing or potentially disappearing. The Mayor expressed some concerns and was keen to ensure a balanced and impartial outcome was achieved. However, in light of the scale of savings that both authorities needed to make, radical changes were necessary. There did need to be processes in place to ensure that both authorities were happy with the proposals going forward. The Mayor also indicated that arrangements were being made for the two Cabinets to meet.

Cabinet expressed concern at the need to protect front line services while moving forward with arrangements such as this. The authority commissioned many specialist services from small local providers which could be adversely affected by such arrangements. It was also suggested that the funding for the investigations should come from elsewhere than the Social Care Reform Grant.

The Acting Chief Executive acknowledged the role of local suppliers and indicated that they were important to the economies of both areas. The management collaboration looked at for the purposes of the feasibility exercise had not extended below Band 15 so it may be that more

efficiencies could be made in some areas whilst ensuring that we protect front line services. Based on the detailed information set out within the report it was proposed that following the prioritisation of services areas, a detailed business case commencing with Child and Adult services be progressed for consideration by Cabinet. Members questioned the potential for other authorities to become involved in the process. The Acting Chief Executive commented that other authorities had already indicated a wish to be involved in the commissioning work.

Decision

- (i) That the development of a detailed business case for collaboration in respect of Child and Adult Services be approved and submitted to Cabinet for decision prior to any implementation.
- (ii) That Hartlepool review the work being undertaken by Darlington in respect of the options available for environmental services, building services, highways, in terms of efficiency and alternative models of delivery and receive a report back on options be submitted prior to the consideration of more detailed Business cases.
- (iii) That a more detailed business case and option in respect of the development of options for Cultural Services including a Cultural Trust be progressed and reported to Cabinet for decision.
- (iv) That an application be made for REIP legacy funding for the anticipated project costs and should this prove unsuccessful that this be funded from Social Care Reform Grant.
- (v) That further work be undertaken in respect of the options and key considerations around potential governance models and that this be considered as part of their development.
- (vi) That officers undertake development work in respect of the financial, Human Resource and legal and technical issues underpinning the development of business cases to be reported to Cabinet for consideration and decision prior to the potential implementation of any completed business case.
- (vii) That Cabinet receives for consideration a more detailed work programme and plan.
- (viii) That any further opportunities for any tactical collaboration outside of the scope identified in this report be developed for Cabinet's consideration and approval.

148. Delivery of Support to Members and to the Council,

Executive, Non Executive and Scrutiny Functions

(Assistant Chief Executive)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To consider options and potential changes to the delivery of support to Members and to the Council, Executive, Non Executive and Scrutiny functions.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Housing and Transition Portfolio Holder reported on a number of options and potential changes in respect of the delivery of support to Members and to the Council, Executive, Non Executive and Scrutiny functions. The options and changes reflect the budget deficits that the Council is continuing to face, the consequent reduced officer base to support the identified functions and the cessation or scaling down of a number of services and activities. The report reflected a reduction in the Council size to 33 Councillors in 2012 as a result of Electoral review recommendations. The outcomes of a range of consultation research to inform the 2011/12 budget process were also recognised.

The report set a series of areas for consideration and made recommendations in relation to each, which the portfolio holder had also commented upon, which included for immediate consideration; Members' Seminars, Constitution Review, Scheduled Meetings, Attendance at Conferences, Standards Committee / Contract Scrutiny Committee / General Purposes Committee / Audit Committee, and Reports / Minutes / decision Records for members. Further recommendations to be agreed for implementation for the 2012/13 Municipal Year included; Scrutiny Forums, sizes of Committees, Cabinet, Members' ICT and Members' Accommodation.

Cabinet's discussions centred around the main sections and recommendations within the report as follows: -

Members' Seminars

It was considered that Members Seminars could be stopped immediately as attendance was generally very poor. If it was essential to brief members on issues, seminars could be carried out immediately before Council meetings.

Constitution Review

The Mayor commented that Hartlepool was one of a very limited number of authorities that undertook the review of the constitution in this way and considered that, following the 2012 elections, reviews were only needed

once each year and should be undertaken by the Monitoring Officer. This view was supported by Cabinet. The Mayor was concerned that there had been constitution changes that had not been implemented in accordance with the appropriate procedures. Cabinet agreed that this matter should be referred to Scrutiny for comments.

Scheduled Meetings

There was great concern at the number of additional meetings called during the year and the impact these additional meetings had. The Mayor and other Cabinet Members were particularly concerned at the number of additional Task and Finish Groups that were being established and that little appeared to have come from these to the executive. The Mayor stated that Members needed to be aware of the number of additional meetings and the lack of capacity to deal with them. Cabinet was also concerned that the majority of the additional Task and Finish and Working Groups were closed meetings.

It was considered that there needed to be closer adherence to the agreed diary. There was a brief discussion on mechanisms to limit the number of additional meetings but it was considered that they would have little effect. Cabinet considered that this was an issue that needed to be considered by Scrutiny.

Attendance at Conferences

It was agreed that the recommendations on conferences could be supported and implemented immediately without need for referral to scrutiny.

Standards Committee/ Contract Scrutiny Committee / General Purposes / Audit Committee

Cabinet considered that the issues relating to contracts were statutory ones that fell within the executive's remit. The Contracts Scrutiny Committee should therefore be deleted and the responsibility for opening tenders transferred to the executive. In all other authorities this duty was undertaken by executive members and processes could be established to do so in Hartlepool with tenders being delegated to either one specific Cabinet Member or to the relevant Portfolio Holder. There would also be a subsequent SRA saving. Scrutiny should be invited to comment on this proposal.

It was agreed that Appeals and Staffing would work better with a set membership and as a separate body. Standards Committee's role should be increased to include monitoring Members attendances. All other matters should be moved to a single 'Operations' Committee. Scrutiny should also be invited to comment on these proposals.

Reports/Minutes/Decision Records for Members

It was agreed that the use of Summary sheets to reports should be ended as soon as practical. Cabinet discussed the issue of all appendices being made available in electronic form only and it was agreed that there should be copies available in the Members Library and on request, as well as electronically.

The Mayor indicated that it would be helpful to make decision making more responsive but was advised that there was legislation through the Access to Information rules which protected public access and transparency to decision making.

Scrutiny Forums

The Mayor commented that there were only four Scrutiny Committees/Forums when the Council adopted the new structure in 2002 and considered that that had worked well. The numbers on the committees/forums should also reduce proportionally with the reduction in the size of Council. There was national recognition for the scrutiny operation of Hertfordshire County Council which only had one scrutiny committee that transacted all its business in one day. The Mayor suggested that consideration should be given to reducing the numbers to three committees/forums.

Cabinet Members indicated that it had been suggested that the 'Regeneration' and 'Neighbourhoods' Forums could be combined comfortably. 'Health' could recombine with the 'Adults' forum as previously, particularly in light of the changes in legislation and the work the new Health and Wellbeing Board would be responsible for. It was suggested that this board would be an additional check and balance on the NHS, which would allow Scrutiny to devote more time to the Council's new Public Health Function. The statutory powers, currently discharged by Health Scrutiny, would be retained within the scrutiny function.

Cabinet considered the suggestion that any Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) savings should go back to Scrutiny. Cabinet suggested that as this was an exercise in reducing the overall budget of Members Support, the savings should be made as a contribution to the overall process.

Cabinet considered that Scrutiny was well aware of issues the Council would face from May 2012 and referred this element to Scrutiny for its deliberation.

Size of Committees

Members agreed that the change in the overall size of Council should as a minimum be reflected in the size of committees, forums and other groups after May 2012. Concerns were expressed about the membership of some of the Licensing Committee sub committees and their capacity to cope with

a reduced overall membership and that this would have to be looked at specifically in the round.

Cabinet

The Mayor noted that the Constitution (and legislation) allowed a Cabinet of between two and ten members including himself. With a reduced council of 33 members the Mayor considered that based on current numbers a Cabinet of up to seven would reflect that change but the issue would need to be judged sensibly.

Members ICT

Members did not feel it was appropriate to set a 'pre-requisite standard' in relation to members' use of ICT. Cabinet was of the view that the current systems were cumbersome and frequently prone to problems and Members would gravitate to a system that could be shown to be easy to operate and reliable. The Assistant Chief Executive requested that should any member have issues with the authorities ICT systems or equipment, they should report them to him so that they could be addressed.

Accommodation

Cabinet considered that further discussions were required on accommodation and that all Members should have the right to input on this issue. Members commented that the accommodation was essentially what Members were given as opposed to an assessment of need.

The Mayor also added that a review of the Council's Outside Bodies should be undertaken to review exactly what bodies the Council did need to be part of. Reducing the numbers on bodies should also be a part of the review.

At the conclusion of the debate, Cabinet indicated that in order to complete the review appropriately, Scrutiny's views on the issues referred should be requested to be reported to Cabinet before Christmas.

Decision

1. That the following Cabinet recommendations be forwarded to scrutiny for its view with a report coming back to Cabinet prior to Christmas 2011.
 - (i) That the constitution be reviewed annually through the Monitoring officer and that the Constitution Committee be abolished, following the 2012 elections.
 - (ii) That the functions of the Standards Committee be extended to include monitoring attendance of Members at induction and training sessions.

- (iii) That the General Purposes (Appeals and Staffing) become a standalone committee with a fixed membership.
 - (iv) That the remaining General Purposes Committee functions be combined with the functions of the Audit Committee to form one expanded “Operations Committee”, with exclusively backbench membership.
 - (v) That the Contract Scrutiny Committee be abolished and the functions relating to contracts/tenders be undertaken by the executive.
 - (vi) That the number of Scrutiny forums be reduced from six to four through the merging of neighbourhood services and regeneration and planning forums and Health to be combined with Adult Services to reflect the council’s new public health role.
2. That the following Cabinet recommendations be implemented forthwith;
- (i) That Members’ Seminars be deleted from the council diary and replaced with ad hoc briefing / training sessions, to be organized following identification of issues by Members/Officers and be held immediately in advance of meetings of full Council.
 - (ii) That the introduction of Task and Finish / Working Groups be monitored to ensure they are resourceable.
 - (iii) That task and finish groups be conducted in public, except where the information being discussed is exempt under the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
 - (iv) That Committee / Forum / Group Chairs be made advised of their responsibility in ensuring that only those additional meetings that are unavoidable are called in light of the additional workload the number of additional meetings over and above the agreed Council Diary are creating.
 - (v) That a ‘freeze’ to be introduced in respect of attendance at conferences where conference costs are incurred. In exceptional circumstances that attendance at conference is justified, the Member attending the Conference is required to feedback to all Members of the Council in both written and verbal form.
 - (vi) That a review of Members accommodation be undertaken involving all Councillors based on the principle of need.
 - (vii) That further consideration be given to improving Members’ ICT with the aim of reducing costs and simplifying its use and that all Councillors be encouraged to utilise the systems available to them.

- (viii) That the practice of producing summary sheets for reports cease as soon as practicable and that appendices to reports are not customarily printed but available electronically, on request and in the Members Library.
- 3. That the following Cabinet recommendations be approved for implementation for the 2012/13 Municipal Year.
 - (i) That the size of all committees / forums established / reappointed after May 2012 reflect the reduction in the overall size of Council.
 - (ii) The Mayor to consider the potential options for the size of the Cabinet and any associated savings in line with the parameters set out in legislation and the Constitution.

149. Declaration of Interest / Inquorate Meeting / Delegation of Power to Determine Matter

As Indicated at Minute No. 139 “Dedarations of Interest by Members”, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor had declared a prejudicial interest in the following item of business.

The Mayor noted that the meeting would not be quorate once he and the Deputy Mayor left the meeting in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

The Mayor, in accordance with his powers under the Local Government Act 2000, delegated authority to the remaining Cabinet Members (Councillors Brash, Hall, Payne and H Thompson) to determine the remaining item of business.

150. Community Pool 2011/2012 – Belle Vue Community Sports and Youth Centre *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to advise and seek approval for the level of grant award to Belle Vue Community Sports and Youth Centre from the Community Pool for the period October 2011 to March 2012.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Acting Chief Executive reported that at the meeting of the Grants Committee on 27th September 2011 a report had been presented recommending approval of awards to 24 voluntary sector groups including Belle Vue Community Sports and Youth Centre. All of the other applications were approved by Grants Committee but as two members of

Grants Committee declared an interest in the Belle Vue application a decision could not be made and so approval for the award to Belle Vue is requested from Cabinet.

An application for funding was presented from Belle Vue Community Sports and Youth Centre. Officers were recommending that an award of £10,171.50 is approved as a contribution to the core costs of the group, including the salary costs of a Finance Officer and a Caretaker.

Cabinet members supported the award of the funding but questioned the need for Cabinet to consider recommendations 2 and 3 which fell more appropriately within the remit of the Grants Committee.

Decision

1. That Grant aid to Belle Vue Community Sports and Youth Centre of £10,171.50 for the period October 2011 to March 2012 be approved.
2. That the remaining recommendations within the report be referred back to the Grants Committee

The meeting concluded at 12.15 p.m.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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