

# **FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

8 September 2025

The meeting commenced at 5.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

## **Present:**

Councillor Martin Scarborough (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillor Gary Allen, Pamela Hargreaves, Jim Lindridge, Melanie Morley, Amanda Napper and Karen Oliver

Also Present: Councillor Rachel Creevy as substitute for Councillor John Nelson in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.

Parish Councillor Minna Ireland

Councillor Tom Feeney

Officers: Hayley Martin, Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources  
James Magog, Director of Finance, IT and Digital  
Craig Blundred, Director of Public Health  
Jill Harrison, Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services  
Kieran Bostock, Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Services  
Catherine Grimwood, Performance and Partnerships Manager  
Catherine Guy, Public Health Registrar  
Jo Stubbs, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

## **10. Apologies for Absence**

Councillors Brenda Harrison, Sue Little and John Nelson

Denise McGuckin, Chief Executive

## **11. Declarations of Interest**

None

## **12. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2025**

Received

**13. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 14 March 2025**

Received

**15. Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter 1 2025/26** *(Author)*

**Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework

**Purpose of report**

To inform members of:

- I. General Fund forecast revenue outturn for 2025/26
- II. Reserves forecasts
- III. Housing Revenue Account forecast outturn for 2025/26
- IV. Corporate Income Collection Performance
- V. Capital Programme Monitoring 2025/26

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The Director of Finance, IT and Digital reported that the cost pressures reported to Committee throughout 2024/25 had largely continued into the 2025/26 financial year. This was due to inflationary and on-going increased demand, areas of income shortfall and significant cost pressures for Children's Social Care external placements, the latter increasing significantly in quarter 1 of 2025/26. In terms of inflation the Consumer Price Index had risen to 3.8% in July with further rises expected.

Since the 2025/26 budget was approved in February 2025 Council had received confirmation of a £10.355m Public Health grant allocation for 2025/26.

The report detailed the latest 2025/26 budget forecast position for the Council. The Director of Finance, IT and Digital noted that while the outturn was £0.5m lower than quarter 1 in the previous year there was still a projected £4.5 million overspend in Children's Services. All departments had been instructed to make every effort to reduce costs where possible. Meetings had been scheduled with the incoming Director of Children's Services to emphasise the need to make savings. The Chair of Children's Services confirmed that measure would be put in place to instigate savings and updates would be provided to Children's Services and Finance and Corporate Affairs Committees.

The Dedicated School Grant was also forecast to overspend and the council awaits further announcements from government on this issue. The

Director of Finance, IT and Digital emphasised the need to maintain reserves at a level to cover this.

### **Decision**

- I. That the 2025/26 forecast outturn position of £2.375m overspend and accompanying financial performance for the year be noted
- II. That the forecast use of reserves be noted
- III. That the 2025/26 forecast outturn in relation to the Housing Revenue Account be noted
- IV. That the capital programme position be noted and budget variations approved

## **16. Corporate Complaints Monitoring Report for 2024/25 and New Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy** (Monitoring Officer)

### **Type of decision**

Key (CE98/25)

### **Purpose of report**

- I. To inform Committee of the 2024/25 outturn position in relation to corporate complaints and those considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)
- II. To agree an updated Customer Feedback and Complaints policy for implementation from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Director of Legal, Governance and HR presented the outturn position in relation to Corporate Complaints and those considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). During 2024/25 15 corporate complaints had been made, the same number as the previous year. In the same period 27 complaints or enquiries had been made against Hartlepool Borough Council to the LGSCO. Of these the majority had been closed after initial enquiries with just 2 fully investigated and upheld. The Director highlighted that Hartlepool compares favourably with the other 11 North East Authorities with the second lowest 'upheld' rate in the region. Hartlepool is also the second highest for the percentage of upheld cases where a satisfactory remedy was provided before the complaint reached the LGSCO.

In April 2025 the LGSCO had introduced a new Complaints Handling Code across their own caseload which had been piloted by several local authorities. Although not statutory there was an expectation that all local authorities would follow this code from April 2026 and approaches to complaint handling would be assessed in future against this code. Hartlepool's current Corporate Complaints, Comments and

Compliments Policy had therefore been reviewed to ensure compliance and renamed Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy. The main changes were a focus on early resolution, changes to response timescales, the introduction of an annual self-assessment and the introduction of a member responsible for complaints. A copy of the proposed new policy was appended to the report.

A member noted the legal requirement for an annual report and suggested that a 6-monthly report might be preferable in terms of being able to identify systemic issues. With regard to the suggestion that the Chair of Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee be the member responsible for complaints members were happy to confirm this initially but felt there may be a conflict of interest in the future.

### **Decision**

- I. That the update on complaints received in 2024/25 be noted and the new Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy be agreed for implementation from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.

## **17. Antipoverty Strategy and Action Update** *(Director of Public Health)*

### **Type of decision**

Key (CJCS 167/25)

### **Purpose of report**

To provide updates on the implementation of the “Investigation into Child and Family Poverty in Hartlepool” recommendations and the progress of the Hartlepool Poverty Truth Commission, Hartlepool’s Antipoverty Strategy and Hartlepool Antipoverty Action Group.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

In July 2023 Finance and Policy Committee had approved the recommendations of the Audit and Governance Committee following an investigation into Child and Family Poverty in Hartlepool. At the same time the Poverty Action Group had formed, a partnership of people and organisations interested in tackling poverty. Members of the group had begun to implement the scrutiny report recommendations. These included the forming of an active Poverty Truth Commission, funded for 18 months through Council donations, the adoption of socio-economic disadvantage as a protected characteristic and the development of the Antipoverty Strategy to reduce current poverty and prevent future poverty.

In terms of making better links between Ward Councillors and their constituents members suggested that the name of Ward Surgeries be changed to something which better explains its purpose and does not suggest a medical facility.

Members noted that the Antipoverty Strategy had not been included with the papers. The Director of Public Health acknowledged this and advised that copies were available at the meeting. The Strategy would be circulated to members afterward

#### **Decision**

- I. That Hartlepool's Antipoverty Strategy and its implementation be supported
- II. That progress relating anti-poverty action in Hartlepool be noted

### **18. Housing Management Service Complaints Policy: Annual Performance Monitoring Report** *(Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods))*

#### **Type of decision**

Non-key

#### **Purpose of report**

To present the annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report and self-assessment for 2024/25 and seek a Government response to this ensuring that Committee has scrutinised the organisation's compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

#### **Issue(s) for consideration**

Social Landlords are legally obliged to follow the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. It requires them to submit an annual submission of their performance and to have a Member responsible for Complaints on their governing body. A standalone Housing Management Service Complaints Policy had been developed in line with the statutory requirements of the Code, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The Assistant Director (Neighbourhood Services) confirmed that it was hoped to have the Priority Services Register in place this financial year and work on its development was ongoing. Staff would be trained to take a holistic approach to the process, signposting vulnerable tenants to other provisions as was felt necessary.

Members were also referred to the self-assessment, a copy of which was attached at Appendix 2. A member noted the difference on clarity detail on this complaints report when compared with the corporate complaints report which had been considered earlier in the meeting. They also suggested that

as with the Corporate Complaints an update be brought every 6 months rather than annually as was legally required.

### **Decision**

- I. That the changes to the Housing Management Complaints Policy be noted
- II. That the annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report and self-assessment for 2024/25 be reviewed and a formal response in writing be provided from the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee in writing for publication as the governing body.

## **19. Annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update** (*Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources*)

### **Type of decision**

For information

### **Purpose of report**

To provide an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) update which includes the Annual Equality Report for 2024/25. This report also includes the Council's gender pay gap data and demonstrates the progress made in delivering the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the local authority comply with the Equality Duty covering 9 protected characteristics. The report highlighted the range of activity delivered by the Council in relation to the EDI Policy. It also set out data available in relation to the locally adopted areas of consideration (care leavers, the armed forces community and inequality relating to poverty and disadvantage).

Following a query as to what provision was available for the blind the Executive Director for Adult and Community Services advised the Council works with Hartlepool Vision Support who supported blind and sensory impaired people to access Council services. The Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources confirmed that any requests for special assistance to attend meetings would be dealt with on an individual basis through Democratic Services.

### **Decision**

That the 2024/25 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report be noted.

## **20. 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.

A member highlighted that today was International Literacy Day. Anyone signing up to Hartlepool's library service or taking out a book in the next 4 weeks would be entered into a prize draw to win an Amazon Fire Kindle.

The meeting concluded at 5:55pm

**H MARTIN**

**DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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