

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

26 March 2012

The meeting commenced at 11.05 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Hilary Thompson (Performance Portfolio Holder)

Officers: John Morton, Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Wally Stagg, Organisational Development Manager
Catherine Frank, Local Strategic Partnership Manager
Joan Chapman, Corporate ICT Manager
Paul Diaz, ICT Support and Development Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

45. Politically Restricted Posts (*Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To advise the Portfolio Holder in respect of posts and post holders which are politically restricted and the role the Head of Paid Service plays in respect of appeals by employees who are politically restricted and to obtain Portfolio Holder approval to proposed changes to the list of politically restricted posts.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Organisational Development Manager outlined the background and current categories of politically restricted posts within the authority. The current list of politically restricted posts submitted as Appendix A to the report was agreed by the previous Performance Portfolio Holder on 10 May 2011. The previous Portfolio Holder asked that a report be brought back to him annually reporting any changes to the current list for approval.

The following changes to the list of politically restricted posts were reported: -

Chief Emergency Planning Officer – no longer designated a Deputy Chief Officer post but the political restriction to remain as the post provides regular advice to the Emergency Planning Joint Committee and Cleveland Local Resilience Forum.

One post of Neighbourhood Manager will be deleted from 1 April 2012 and the

postholder will be redeployed to a post which is not politically restricted. The post of Customer and Support Services Manager has been temporarily added to the list of Deputy Chief Officers (and the post holder advised accordingly) as the post now reports directly to the Assistant Chief Executive as part of the temporary arrangements made in respect of the joint Head of HR arrangement with Darlington.

On 1 April 2012 the posts of LSP Manager and Performance and Consultation Manager will be deleted and a new post of Performance & Partnerships Manager and a new temporary post of Collaboration Programme Co-ordinator will be created. Both posts will be politically restricted.

Decision

That the proposed changes to the list of politically restricted posts as reported be approved.

46. Irrecoverable Debts – Council Tax (*Chief Finance Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to write-out a number of council tax debts, which are now considered to be irrecoverable.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer reported on the council tax accounts with outstanding debts of £1000 or more together with the reason for each debt remaining unrecovered and seeking the approval of the Portfolio Holder to write out the debts. Details of the individual debts were set out in confidential appendices to the report – the appendices 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).

The Portfolio Holder sought assurances on the extent to which attempts were made to recover debts. The Assistant Chief Finance Officer indicated that every attempt was made to recover debts including liaising with other agencies. Absconders, for example, were pursued for a period of twelve months but eventually the costs associated with such investigations became uneconomic. The authority did have an excellent record in the collection of council tax with the long term collection rate being 99.2% and write-offs of debt being substantially lower than comparable authorities.

Decision

That the write-out debts to the value of £44,203.91 (plus costs of £3,182.57) in respect of irrecoverable Council Tax be approved..

47. Irrecoverable Debts – Benefit Overpayments (*Chief Finance Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to write-out a number of benefit overpayments which are now considered to be irrecoverable.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer reported on the benefit overpayments with outstanding debts of £1000 or more and detailed the reasons why each debt is now deemed to be appropriate for write out. Details of the individual debts were set out in confidential appendices to the report – the appendices 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).

Decision

That the write-out debts to the value of £ 87,194.42 in respect of irrecoverable benefit overpayments be approved.

48. Hartlepool Borough Council Information Governance Approach (*Assistant Chief Executive*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To report to the portfolio holder the results of the recent IT security testing and Hartlepool Borough Councils approach to information governance.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The ICT Support and Development Manager reported that Some of the data we hold as a local authority, if lost or stolen, could result in distress, financial loss and in extreme cases danger for vulnerable individuals within Hartlepool. For HBC, depending on the type of data involved, it could mean financial penalties being imposed by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

The report set out the measures to reduce the risks of data, especially confidential data being lost or stolen that the Council had put in place. In order to test these measures and as part of its annual Code of Connection health check the Council commissions independent auditing of these measures on an annual basis. The testing process involves two stages - External testing involves testing the Councils external facing systems (Website, payment portals etc) and Internal testing checks the Councils internal servers, PC's and network.

The findings for this years test both from an internal and external perspective were very positive. Although some issues were found, including some old user accounts and minor patching issues, in the tester's own words HBC "are ahead of the game" and a number of issues that would normally be found within other Councils could not be replicated here. It was also reported that the authority had recently been reapproved for a further year as part of the government's GCSX secure e-mailing system.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the report and considered that securing the information held on vulnerable people was of the greatest importance.

Decision

That the report be noted and the process of raising the profile of Information Governance across the Council be supported and the independent auditing of the Council's IT estate should continue.

49. 36th Phase of View Point – Citizen's Panel *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To provide an explanation of why topics were included in Viewpoint 36, and what departments plan to do with the results. To inform the Portfolio Holder of the results from the 36th phase of Viewpoint that was distributed to panel members in November 2011.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Local Strategic Partnership Manager reported Viewpoint 36 had been sent in November 2011 to all 1,400 active members of the panel. A response rate of 69 per cent was achieved with 955 questionnaires being returned. The questionnaire included questions on; Kerbside Recycling Service, Domestic Violence, Minimum Price for Alcohol, and Summerhill.

The results had been reported back to the relevant departments within the council and would be reported back to Viewpoint members via a regular newsletter. A copy of the overall report would also be placed in the members' library, in all public libraries across the Borough for public access and had been placed on the council's website. The reasons for the inclusion of the various subjects in this edition of Viewpoint were set out in the report and appended to the report was a full statistical breakdown of the responses received.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the report and in particular the high response rate to the questionnaire.

Decision

That the results from the 36th phase of Viewpoint be noted.

50. Free School Meals Take up Impacts (*Chief Finance Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the impact of initiatives by the council's benefits and awards section to maximize take up of free school meals (FSM) within the borough.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer reported that the Council had progressively over recent months sought to remove as many barriers to accessing FSM support as possible. Since April 2011, the council's Housing and Council Tax Benefits Service has administered FSM, following a transfer of responsibility from the Child and Adult Services Department. A focus of the new arrangements has been to improve the service by simplifying and streamlining the process of making a claim. The council was also working in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions to this extent.

The award of FSM is an important element of the support arrangements available to those that are financially disadvantaged, particularly so during the current economic downturn. In addition, increasing FSM take up has implications for the council's Catering DSO by providing an increased customer base, thereby assisting in the sustainability of the catering service.

As part of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, the coalition government announced the introduction of a Pupil Premium grant. This grant is payable to those schools (excluding nursery and sixth form pupils) educating children accessing FSM, Looked After Children and a lower amount to Service children. The Pupil Premium grant is currently £488 per FSM pupil (and will increase to £600 per FSM pupil in 2012/13) and is awarded to schools in a financial year dependent on the number of FSM pupils they have as at the previous January pupil number census.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the report and in particular the work that had been undertaken to provide 296 more children with free school meals. The changes made to the systems for claiming free school meals were also welcomed as a proactive measure benefitting children, families and schools through the payment of the pupil premium.

Decision

That the progress being made to maximize free school meal take up and the associated financial benefit to schools be noted.

51. Employee Attendance 2011/12 3rd Quarter *(Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To update the Portfolio Holder on sickness absence management performance up to the third quarter of 2011/12, and actions taken across the Council.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Organisational Development Manager reported that the extent to which employees are absent from work due to illness had a direct impact on the quality, level and cost of the provision of services. As such the Council had included this as a Local Performance Indicator (HRPI 5A) – The number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence in its group of Corporate Health Performance Indicators.

The target figure for 2011/12 for the Council was 8.80 days absence per wte employee (whole time equivalent). The end of year prediction at the end of the 3rd quarter shows we are below target at 8.02 days per wte per employee. This showed a continuous cycle of improvement since 2006. The Council continued to focus on sickness absence management to ensure the Council achieved its target of 8.80 wte average sickness per employee for the 2011/12 year. The report included details of the performance in individual departments.

The Organisational Development Manager highlighted that long term sickness levels were still an issue though the figures were now declining. The Portfolio Holder welcomed the report and in particular the information that the council was on track to meet the target figure of 8.80 days per wte. The Portfolio Holder commented that during the current situation with budget cuts and redundancies and the additional pressures and workloads placed upon staff it was encouraging that sickness levels had not risen.

Decision

That employee absence in the third quarter of 2011/12 and actions taken, or planned, be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 a.m.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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