



Chief Executive's Department
Civic Centre
HARTLEPOOL

14th January 2013

The Mayor (Stuart Drummond)

Councillors Ainslie, C Akers-Belcher, S Akers-Belcher, Atkinson, Beck, Brash, Cook, Cranney, Dawkins, Fisher, Fleet, Gibbon, Griffin, Hall, Hargreaves, Hill, Jackson, James, Lauderdale, A E Lilley, G Lilley, Loynes, Dr. Morris, Payne, Richardson, Robinson, Shields, Simmons, Sirs, Tempest, Thompson, Wells and Wilcox.

Madam or Sir,

You are hereby summoned to attend an Extraordinary meeting of the COUNCIL to be held on THURSDAY, 24 January 2013 at 7.00 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool to consider the subjects set out in the attached agenda.

Yours faithfully

D Stubbs
Chief Executive

Enc

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL AGENDA



24 January 2012

at 7.00 p.m.

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

1. To receive apologies from absent members.
2. To receive any declarations of interest from members.
3. To deal with any business required by statute to be done before any other business.
4. Report of the Executive - Localisation of Council Tax Support 2013/14 (attached)



EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL

24 January 2013



Report of: The Cabinet

**Subject: LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT
2013/14**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To present details of the final proposals for the Localised Council Tax Support scheme for 2013/14.

2. CONSIDERATION OF SCHEME PROPOSALS BY COUNCIL.

- 2.1 A comprehensive report on this issue was considered by Cabinet on 17th December and is attached at Appendix A. The Cabinet report details the the issues and financial risks associated with the Government's decision to abolish the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme on 31st March 2013 and the requirement that councils introduce Local Council Tax Support schemes to operate from 1st April 2013.
- 2.2 As part of these changes the funding allocated to councils to operate Local Council Tax Support schemes will be reduced by 10% nationally (13.4% in Hartlepool following the recent grant funding announcement). Councils will also be required to protect low income pensioners from this change, which means other working age adults will face higher reductions in existing Council Tax Support. The Cabinet report outlined three potential options for a Local Council Tax Support scheme and recommended a scheme based on an 8.5% reduction in support. This proposal secures additional one-off Government Grant funding for 2013/14.
- 2.3 The Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, supported by the Localising Council Tax Benefit Working Group, has considered the implications of the Government reforms and support the Cabinet proposal to implement an 8.5% reduction in support.
- 2.4 Since consideration of this issue by Cabinet, the Government presented the Local Government Finance Settlement to Parliament on 19th December 2012. This included details of the actual level of cash limited grant the Government will be providing to the Council for its Local Council Tax Support scheme. The 2013/14 grant allocation is £9.8m, which is £140,000 less than previously forecast. A report to Cabinet on 21st December 2012 recommended that this specific grant reduction and

a higher than anticipated reduction in the Council's main revenue grant should be funded from the 2012/13 Collection Fund surplus. This proposal enables the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme based on an 8.5% reduction in support to be maintained for 2013/14.

- 2.5 It should be noted that in order to access the one off transitional funding the Government is making available to those authorities which limit the reduction in Council Tax Support to 8.5% in 2013/14, the Council will not be able to implement Principle 3 i.e. reduce the capital / savings threshold for working age households from £16,000 to £10,000. As only a very small number of claims would have been affected by the capital / savings change the cost of not progressing Principle 3 for 2013/14 can be absorbed within the overall local scheme costings. On this basis, the Council will not be prevented from accessing the Transitional Grant of £0.26m for 2013/14.
- 2.6. The Council's responsibility to consult with the public on its draft local scheme proposals was discharged by the formal consultation process which lasted eight weeks ending on 9th November 2012. The results of this consultation were set out in the report considered by Cabinet on 17th December. Additional consultation was undertaken at a Hartlepool Carer's Rights Day on 30th November at the request of the Scrutiny Localising Council Tax Benefit working group. There were 21 responses captured at the Carer's Rights Day and whilst these individuals considered Principles 4 and 6 to be fair, there was a lower level of support or opposition to the other principles.
- 2.7 The proposed proposal put forward by Cabinet should enable the Council to implement a sustainable LCTS scheme for 2013/14. However, the scheme will need to be reviewed on an annual basis to reflect changing economic conditions and Government funding allocations for future years. This will include close monitoring to ensure actual claimant numbers and collection rates of council tax are in line with planning forecasts as any variances will either require the Council to revise the local scheme for future years, or result in an additional General Fund budget pressure.
- 2.8 The proposal to reduce Council Tax Support does not affect low income pensioners.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The proposal which Cabinet wishes Council to consider were detailed in the Cabinet report and are repeated below. Recommendations (ii) to (viii) provide funding to enable the implementation of recommendation (i):
 - i) Approves the implementation of Option 3 – i.e. an initial 8.5% reduction in existing support for households currently receiving Council Tax Benefit for 2013/14 (excluding low income pensioners who are protected);

- ii) Approves the proposed changes to Council Tax exemptions and the allocation of the resulting additional income of £0.3m to partly mitigate the impact of the Government Council Tax Benefit grant cut in 2013/14 and future years;
- iii) Implements the following scheme principles
 - Principle 2 – Increase Non Dependant Deductions in line with Government increases
 - Principle 4 - measures to encourage work by increasing earnings disregards by £5 per week;
 - Principle 5 - changes to streamline / simplify the administration of a local CTS scheme by abolishing second adult rebate and restricting backdating to 4 weeks;
 - Principle 6 Maintain the existing local war widow / war pension disregards ;
- iv) Approves the application of £0.67m of the one-off Council Tax Scheme Transitional Support Reserves of £1.197m to partly mitigate the impact of the Government Council Tax Benefit grant cut over the period 2013/14 to 2016/17;
- v) Approves that the balance on the Transitional Support Reserve of £0.527m be earmarked to manage risks associated with the LCTS in 2013/14 and future years;
- vi) Approves the use of £0.160m from the Supporting Family Poverty Reserve and to note this will leave an uncommitted balance of £0.149m;
- vii) Approves funding the shortfall in Council Tax Support grant in 2013/14 of £140,000 from the forecast Collection Fund surplus in 2012/13, further details to be set out within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- viii) Notes that the approved Local Council Tax Support Scheme will be subject to annual review/approval by full Council and it is currently anticipated the cut in Council Tax Support will increase to 15% for 2014/15 and 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17;
- ix) Note that the Medium Term Financial Strategy report to be referred to Council in February will include the funding decisions covered by the above recommendations.

CABINET

17 December 2012



Report of: Chief Finance Officer

**Subject: LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT
2013/14**

1. TYPE OF DECISION / APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Key decision test (i) and (ii) apply.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purposes of the report are:

- i) To set out the implications of the Government's replacement of the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme with a localised Council Tax Support scheme and the linkages to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) ; and
- ii) To enable Cabinet to approve a proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2013/14 to be referred to full Council for approval.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The existing national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme will be abolished at the end of 2012/13. From April 2013, local authorities will be required to operate their own local schemes of Council Tax Support. Cabinet on 3rd September agreed to a proposed local scheme centred around six core principles to be the subject of formal consultation as required by statute, the results of which are detailed within this report at section 6.
- 3.2 National regulations require full Council approval of the proposed Local Council Tax Support scheme on an annual basis. Once agreed the approved scheme cannot be changed in-year, although it can be reviewed annually and changes implemented for future years.

APPENDIX A

- 3.3 If councils do not approve a Local Council Tax Support scheme before the statutory 31st January 2013 deadline, they will be required to implement a default scheme for 2013/14. If this situation arises this will result in a significant budget pressure as the cost of a default scheme will be the same as the existing national scheme, but Government funding to operate the local scheme will still be reduced. The financial impact on Hartlepool of a default scheme in 2013/14 based on latest data would be a gross budget pressure of £1.38m, as detailed in paragraph 7.6. This pressure would reduce to a net £0.68m after applying the pressure already included within the MTFS and by implementing changes to Council Tax exemptions. The Council would be required to maintain a default scheme throughout 2013/14 and could only then introduce a local scheme in 2014/15 – a year after it is expected most other Councils will have implemented a local scheme.
- 3.4 The costs of the current national CTB scheme are met by the Department for Work and Pensions on a demand led basis. Therefore, if costs increase councils receive more funding. Under the new arrangements for funding Local Council Tax Support schemes the Council will be allocated a cash limited grant. The Government has stated that the national grant cut will be 10%, however when account is taken of the value of awards under the current CTB scheme and the recommended Council Tax increase for 2013/14 the actual grant cut for Hartlepool for 2013/14 is 12.2%. The local impact is slightly less than the 14% cut forecast in September and reflects the impact of the recommended Council Tax increase reducing from 2.5% to 2% and a small change in claimant numbers.
- 3.5 Provisional data from the Government shows that the national funding control totals for Council Tax Support schemes in England are estimated at £3.387 billion in 2013/14. There will be a further cash reduction to £3.383 billion in 2014/15 and when account is taken of Council Tax increases and potential demand pressures the real term reduction is greater, which will increase the financial challenges Councils need to manage. The impact on Hartlepool is reflected in the financial modelling detailed later in the report.
- 3.6 The updated MTFS report presented to Cabinet in June recognised the impact of future Government grant reductions for Local Council Tax Support Schemes and included a budget pressure of £0.4m in 2013/14, rising to £0.8m in 2014/15 to partly cover the impact of these grant cuts, the impact of annual Council Tax increases and to provide a small provision for increased demand led costs. No additional pressure was included in the budget forecasts for either 2015/16 or 2016/17 owing to the uncertainty of this change and this position may need to be reviewed when the MTFS is rolled forward.
- 3.7 The inclusion of this budget pressure will not remove the requirement to reduce existing levels of Council Tax Support owing to the level of the

Government grant cuts being implemented for Council Tax Support and the level of General Fund budget deficits.

- 3.8 In addition, these changes transfer an additional financial risk to the Council as any increase in claimant numbers will result in an in-year budget pressure which will need to be funded from either the 2013/14 General Fund budget and / or reserves. The Council would then need to address the medium term sustainability of the scheme by either reviewing the local Council Tax Support scheme for 2014/15, or funding an additional General Fund budget pressure.
- 3.9 The Government have stated that in introducing a Local Council Tax Support Scheme, it will require local authorities to ensure that low income pensioners are protected. As reported previously, this protection will mean that working age households currently in receipt of CTB will face higher cuts in their financial support as a result of the Government funding cut.
- 3.10 The changes to the CTB scheme are only one component of the Welfare Reform changes being implemented by the Government and many households in Hartlepool will be adversely affected by a number of these changes. This will be extremely challenging for household budgets and will also impact on the local economy given the relatively high level of benefit recipients within the borough.

4. Overview of Government Proposals and Requirements

- 4.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 details the Government's proposals for the abolition of national Council Tax Benefit and its replacement with new localised schemes. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 sets out a framework for new localised council tax support schemes. This primary legislation will be supplemented by detailed statutory regulations, which are still yet to be finalised. The key features of the local Council Tax Support Scheme proposals are:
- Headline Government funding for local schemes will be reduced by 10%;
 - There will be a statutorily prescribed scheme for low income pensioners that will maintain support in line with the current CTB scheme for current and future low income pensioners;
 - Councils will be free to design their own schemes and may supplement the cost of a local scheme from their own budgets / resources.
- 4.2 The Council will need to adopt a Local Scheme by 31st January 2013 and failure to do so will result in a Default Scheme being imposed. The Local CTS scheme decision will be required to be made by full Council.

APPENDIX A

A Default Scheme would be equivalent to the current CTB scheme, which would result in an additional forecast gross budget pressure of £1.38m in 2013/14. After apply the budget pressures included in the MTFS and additional council tax revenue from making changes to Council Tax exemptions and discounts there would still be a net deficit of £0.68m in 2013/14. This would need to be funded by either making additional General Fund budget cuts, or form the one-off risk reserve for managing the implementation of this change. If the risk reserve was used this would commit a significant element of the £1.197m and mean that the Council had to implement a 20% reduction in 2014/15.

- 4.3 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 also introduces technical reforms to Council Tax that will provide Council's with the potential to generate additional Council Tax revenue from making changes to Council Tax exemptions and discounts covering empty properties that are uninhabitable / undergoing major repairs, short term empty unfurnished properties and second homes. The additional Council Tax revenues can be used to offset in part the costs of a local Council Tax Support Scheme or could be used to fund General Fund expenditure.
- 4.4 The major potential income stream arises from 'encouraging' councils to use existing flexibility to increase Council Tax yield by removing the former 50% discount on empty Council Tax properties (after 6 months). However, Hartlepool implemented this change as part of the strategy for balancing the current 2012/13 budget. Therefore, the income from this change is already committed to supporting the General Fund budget on an ongoing basis.
- 4.5 Details of the potential additional Council Tax yields for Hartlepool from implementing other technical changes are set out in the table below. It is recommended that these proposals are approved by Members and the resources allocated to partly mitigate the Government CTB grant cut. The achievement of this additional Council Tax income will need careful management during 2013/14.

Potential Additional Council Tax yield from proposed Changes to Exemptions and Discounts

Class	Description	Current Charge	Proposed Charge	Forecast Yield £
A	Properties undergoing or in need of major structural repair and uninhabitable	Exempt for up to 12 months	50% discount for up to 12 months	53,000
C	Properties Empty and unfurnished	Exempt for 6 months	100% discount for 1 month only	148,000

APPENDIX A

	2 nd Homes	10% discount	Zero discount %	29,000
	Properties empty over 2 years	100%	150%	70,000
			Total	300,000

4.6 The financial modelling detailed in section 7 recommends the above proposals are implemented. This additional income will partly mitigate the cut in Government grant for Council Tax Support and therefore the cut in support which the Council will not be able to avoid passing on to households currently receiving Council Tax Benefit.

4.7 Major Precepting Authorities (i.e. Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Authority) will also be affected by the local Council Tax Scheme proposals. From April 2013 major precepting Authorities will receive a share of the existing national CTB funding and will be required to fund their share of the financial risk of operating the new local Council Tax Support Scheme. Under this arrangement funding and risks are shared on the following basis:

- 85% - Hartlepool Council;
- 11% - Cleveland Police Authority
- 4% - Cleveland Fire Authority.

Officers have been consulting with these bodies as part of the development of a Hartlepool local scheme.

4.8 In relation to Parish Councils the national regulations require billing authorities (i.e. Hartlepool Borough Council) to pass on an element of the Council Tax Support grant received to individual Parish Council's. For some local authorities with a large number of Parish Council's levying relatively high additional Parish Council Tax precepts this may be a significant issue. This is not the case for Hartlepool as the total share of the grant for all parish councils is estimated at around £1,200.

4.9 Additional Government Proposals

4.10 On 16th October the Government made an unexpected announcement regarding an additional £100m "transitional funding" being made available for 2013/14 only. Councils will need to meet specific DCLG criteria conditions to access this funding. The most significant condition is that CTS support awards should be no more than 8.5% less than awards under the existing CTB scheme. The impact of this proposal on the development of the Council's scheme is detailed later in the report.

APPENDIX A**5. Impact of headline 10% cut in Government Support for local Council Tax Support Schemes**

- 5.1 As detailed earlier in the report the Government has stated that the national grant cut will be 10%, however when account is taken of the value of awards under the current CTB scheme and a forecast council tax rise for 2013/14 the actual grant cut for Hartlepool for 2013/14 is 12.2%. The local impact is slightly less than the 14% cut forecast in September and reflects the impact of the recommended Council Tax increase reducing from 2.5% to 2% and a small change in claimant numbers.
- 5.2 Regional analysis by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) shows that Hartlepool faces the largest cut in CTS scheme grant per head of population in the North East of £14.58. Hartlepool's cut is nearly twice the cut of the lowest reduction in the North East of around £8 and is significantly more than the average across the Country. The table below shows the estimated impact of the Government's grant cut in £ per person.

Estimated Grant Cut per Head of Population

Authority	Grant Cut per head of population £ per person
Hartlepool	14.58
Middlesbrough	12.85
Gateshead	12.04
South Tyneside	11.77
Redcar & Cleveland	11.31
Durham	10.75
Newcastle	9.95
Sunderland	9.76
North Tyneside	9.33
Stockton	8.87
Darlington	8.80
Northumberland	7.78

Source: Association of North East Councils

- 5.3 Based on the local cut in Government funding the previous report indicated that the Council would need to implement a 20% cut in support for existing Council Tax Benefit claimants (excluding low income pensioners who are protected) for 2013/14. To help to mitigate this impact the previous forecast included provision for discretionary support for hardship, based on a funding allocation of £0.23m in 2013/14, £0.18m in 2014/15 and £0.1m in 2015/16 and 2016/17. These proposals formed the basis of the formal public consultation on the implementation of a local Council Tax Support Scheme. In addition, the consultation included the option of limiting the reduction to 15% in 2013/14 and 20% in 2014/15 and future years.

- 5.4 The following paragraphs provide details of the results of the public consultation and revised financial modelling, which will enable Cabinet to recommend a Local Council Tax Support Scheme to be referred to full Council in January.

6. Public Consultation Results

- 6.1 A draft of the LCTS Scheme was approved for public consultation at the Cabinet meeting on 3rd September 2012. The draft Scheme then went out for formal consultation with the public on 14 September 2012 for a period of eight weeks ending on 9th November 2012. The consultation process was publicised in Hartbeat, the Hartlepool Mail, on Radio Hartlepool and on the council's website. Specific consultation events were also held with the two Neighbourhood Forums.
- 6.2 The consultation used the Council's normal consultation arrangements via "survey monkey" and a detailed questionnaire was designed to gather feedback on the proposed schemes. The questionnaire could be completed online, using the web based "survey monkey" or paper copies were available from a number of council buildings across the Borough. "Survey Monkey" is used by the Council for the majority of its major consultations and allows residents to complete questionnaires electronically, wherever they have an internet connection – at home, work, libraries etc.
- 6.3 The consultation was based around six key principles previously approved by Cabinet and also the concept of an extreme hardship fund to help mitigate the impact of the Scheme changes on individual households:

Principle 1 - Every working age household should pay something towards Council Tax

Existing CTB claimants should have their current entitlements recalculated and reduced to ensure a sustainable local Council Tax Support Scheme.

Principle 2 - Everyone in the Household should contribute

Under the current national CTB scheme, when assessing a claimant's entitlement to help, other adults in the claimant's home (ie. non dependants) are treated as contributing towards the council tax bill resulting in a lower level of CTB award. The Government are implementing a programme of increases in non dependant deduction levels and Hartlepool's local Scheme will not make any further adjustments in addition to those planned by central government.

APPENDIX A**Principle 3 - Benefit should not be paid to those with relatively large capital / savings**

The local Scheme proposes £10,000 as a capital limit ie. claimants with savings greater than £10,000 will have no entitlement. This will ensure that people with significant savings cannot claim support whilst continuing to encourage saving for the future.

Principle 4 – The scheme should encourage work

Under the current national CTB scheme claimants are allowed to keep some of their earnings before they are taken into account in the benefit calculation (currently set at £5, £10 and £25 for single person, couple and single parent households respectively). The Hartlepool local Scheme will increase earnings disregards by £5 per week to further develop work incentives and result in a CTS scheme consistent with that being considered by other Councils.

Principle 5 – Streamline / Simplify the Local CTS Scheme

The Hartlepool Local Scheme will introduce changes that will assist in administration and provide greater clarity and ease of understanding for claimants, in particular the removal of 2nd Adult Rebate, and the restriction of backdating to a maximum of 4 weeks.

Principle 6- Retain War Widows / War Pensions local disregards framework

Under the national CTB regulations Local Authorities are required to disregard the first £10 per week of War Pension Scheme and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments. In addition local authorities have the discretion to top up the disregard to the full amount. This discretionary top up is currently applied by Hartlepool and the existing arrangements should be carried over to the local CTS scheme.

- 6.4 In total 303 responses were received, which is in line with the responses received for other consultations. Around 86% of responses were from people not currently receiving Council Tax Benefit. The lack of engagement and participation by those most likely to be affected by the changes is similar to the experience of other local authorities.
- 6.5 The following table summarises the result of the consultation responses received and shows a high level of support for each core principle. Whilst the consultation provides the view of those people who responded Cabinet also needs to consider the wider implications of these changes, on both individual households and the Council's own financial position, particularly the collection of additional Council Tax from low income households.

Public Consultation Outcomes

		Principle is Fair
Principle 1	Recalculate and reduce Council Tax Support by 20%	68.3%
	Recalculate and reduce Council Tax Support by 15% in 13/14 rising to 20% in subsequent years	49.6%
Principle 2	Non Dependant Deductions should be increased in line with Government increases	80.5%
Principle 3	Working Age Households with more than £10,000 in capital should not be eligible for council tax support	62.1%
Principle 4	Encourage work by increasing the amount of earnings people are entitled to keep before their council tax support is calculated	81.8%
Principle 5	Remove 2 nd Adult Rebate	78.4%
	Restrict Backdating of CTS to 4 weeks	70.7%
Principle 6	War Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Payments should not be taken into account when calculating council tax support	73.9%

6.6 In addition the majority of respondents agreed with the concept of measures to mitigate the effects of the changes. Whilst this question specifically related to the provision a discretionary fund there are other methods of providing support, such as a lower reduction in support for all households.

6.7 Over the summer months a working group of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, representatives from the voluntary sector providing Welfare Advice services and Council Officers has considered various issues relating to the development of a local Council Tax Support scheme. This process has been very useful in evaluating the financial and practical implications of issues relating to the development of a local scheme.

7. Financial Modelling – Updated position

7.1 As previously reported the replacement of the current national CTB scheme and funding arrangements with a local Council Tax Support Scheme from April 2013 transfers a significant additional financial risk to the Council owing to the impact of the following factors which will need managing:

- Impact of Government CTB grant cut;

APPENDIX A

- Potential increases in demand for Council Tax Support;
 - The impact on collection rates from reducing existing Council Tax support to low income households. This is a significant issue and the greater the cut in existing Council Tax Support the greater the impact on collection rates.
- 7.2 The impact on Council Tax collection rates of reducing existing CTB is expected to be one of the most challenging aspects of these changes which the Council will need to manage. The Council operates effective arrangements covering the collection of Council Tax. In 2011/12, 97.2% of Council Tax due for the year was collected by 31st March, the same as the national unitary average and placed Hartlepool joint second in the Tees Valley. This is a very positive position given the higher levels of deprivation in Hartlepool compared to many other areas. The long term collection rate is 99.2% after 5 years and uncollected Council Tax generally relate to people who have died, or absconded.
- 7.3 A local CTS scheme will involve households either receiving Council Tax bills with amounts due for the first time (ie. where previously they paid nothing under the national CTB scheme) or higher amounts of Council Tax to pay. Recovery of these amounts of Council Tax will be significantly more difficult owing to pressure on household budgets therefore collection rates will be much less certain and this will also have implications for bad debt provisions. This is an unprecedented change and the only experience of a similar nature was the impact on collection rates when the Community Charge was introduced in 1990 which required Councils to collect a local tax from individuals who had not previously had to make such payments. Reduced collection rates for Community Charge impacted on Council's budgets and were one of the factors which resulted in this system being replaced with Council Tax in April 1993. It is not expected that these changes will have the same impact on collection rates as occurred with the Community Charge, although they will make collecting overall Council Tax more difficult.
- 7.4 The Government have indicated that in 3 years time a review should be undertaken to establish whether local Council Tax Support should be included within the new system of Universal Credit and paid to the individual. This would be a very significant financial risk for Hartlepool as the Council Tax Support grant (£9.94m for 2013/14) would not be paid directly to the Council but would be paid to individual households as part of the Universal Credit. The Council would then need to collect all council tax liabilities from individual households, which would be extremely challenging. It seems illogical for the National Government to pay tax payers money out to individual households and then require individual councils to collect this money, as this would be expensive and potentially destabilise local authorities financial positions. The Local Government Association has already expressed concerns about this suggestion.

APPENDIX A

- 7.5 The risks detailed above have been reflected in the financial models in the following paragraphs, although current planning assumptions will need close monitoring and regular review in light of actual experience in 2013/14. Collection costs associated with claimants on low incomes paying small amounts may increase and collection will be time consuming and difficult especially as many households will also be affected by the wider welfare reforms. The operational impacts of the changes are covered within section 8 of this report.
- 7.6 As reported previously the Council faces a forecast funding shortfall as a result of the national reduction in funding for Council Tax Support of 10%. As detailed earlier in the report this equates to a 12.2% funding cut for 2013/14, which equates to £1.38m and this is forecast to increase to £2.4m by 2016/17, a 20% funding cut. These deficits are owing to the known Government grant cuts for 2013/14 and 2014/15, the expectation of a cash freeze in grant funding in 2015/16 and 2016/17 and the impact of assumed annual Council Tax increases on the costs of providing Council Tax support to all households, including low income pensioners.
- 7.7 These forecasts are based on claimant levels remaining broadly at existing levels. Caseloads for pensioner claims have remained broadly unchanged since July 2009. For working age claimants the number of claims increased between April 2009 and April 2010 and then remained broadly stable until October 2011. There was then a further increase of just over 1.5% between October 2011 and January 2012, since which time caseloads have remained broadly unchanged.
- 7.8 As detailed earlier in the report the MTFs forecasts included £0.4m in 2013/14, increasing to £0.8m in 2014/15 to partly address the impact of the Government CTB grant cut. The pressure included in the MTFs partly mitigates the gross funding gaps detailed above.
- 7.9 The Council will be able to further mitigate the funding gap by implementing a range of changes to exemptions which should increase Council Tax income on a sustainable basis by £0.3m per annum, as detailed at 4.5. It is recommended that Members approve these proposals and allocate these resources to partly mitigate the Government CTB grant cut. Achieving this income will be challenging as it is based on an assessment of current level of exemptions granted and these may change.
- 7.10 After reflecting the above factors the Council still faces a forecast funding gap of £0.68m for 2013/14, which is forecast to increase to £1.3m by 2016/17 as set out below. These are the net deficits if a local Council Tax Support Scheme is not implemented and the Council is required to fund a default scheme from the General Fund budget, which would increase the forecast budget deficits previously reported.

APPENDIX A

	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
Assumed Council Tax Increase	2%	2%	2.5%	2.5%
	£m	£m	£m	£m
HBC share of forecast Council Tax Support at existing levels	11.32	11.55	11.84	12.14
Forecast Council Tax Support Grant + Floor Ceiling Adjustments	(9.94)	(9.74)	(9.74)	(9.74)
Gross Funding Gap	1.38	1.81	2.1	2.4
Pressure included in MTFs	(0.4)	(0.8)	(0.8)	(0.8)
Changes to CTax Exemptions	(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.3)
Net Funding Gap	0.68	0.71	1.0	1.3

7.11 Cabinet previously approved that owing to the overall financial position of the Council that the net deficit will need to be addressed by reducing the existing level of CTB support. This formed the basis of the consultation proposal approved by Cabinet.

7.12 Further financial modelling work has now been completed and this indicates there are two options for implementing a Local Council Tax Support scheme:

- Option 1 – Implement planned 20% reduction from 2013/14
- Option 2 – Implement a 15% reduction for 2013/14 to 2015/16 and increase to 20% in 2016/17
- Option 3 - Implement a 8.5% reduction for 2013/14 and 15% for 2014/15 and 2015/16 and increase to 20% in 2016/17

Further information of the impact of these options is set out in the following paragraphs.

7.13 Option 1 – Implement planned 20% reduction from 2013/14

7.14 This is the initial proposal previously recommended and provided as a sustainable solution based on financial modelling undertaken at the time.

7.15 This option recognised the impact on individual households of a 20% reduction in existing Council Tax support and proposed funding discretionary support to mitigate the impact of this reduction.

7.16 Further work on the operation of a discretionary Hardship Scheme has now been completed. As Members will be aware the award of existing Council Tax Support is based on a detailed 'means test', based on an

APPENDIX A

assessment of income, which therefore targets support at low income households. These arrangements will continue when a Local Council Tax support scheme is implemented. A local discretionary Hardship Scheme would require a further more detailed means test, which would need to examine both income and expenditure. One of the inherent problems with operating such a scheme is the potential that all 8,600 working age households affected by the LCTS Scheme may choose to apply for a discretionary hardship award. If this were to happen it would result in a potential significant administrative burden, processing delays which would mean individual households would not know if they would receive additional support and frustrate the council tax recovery process.

7.17 In broad terms, the level of funding identified for a hardship scheme in 2013/14 would equate to reducing the overall cut from 20% to 15%, assuming all households received a hardship award. This is not an unreasonable assumption as it would be extremely difficult to design criteria which targeted this support and also complied with equality requirements.

7.18 Option 2 – Implement a 15% reduction for 2013/14 to 2015/16 and increase to 20% in 2016/17

7.19 Further financial modelling has been completed since the initial proposals were prepared and this reflects the impact of the recommended Council Tax increases for 2013/14 and 2014/15 reducing from 2.5% to 2%. This change reduces the overall cost of operating a local scheme.

7.20 The revised financial modelling demonstrates that the initial reduction in support can be reduced from 20% to 15% and it is anticipated this can be sustained until 2015/16. From 2016/17 it is anticipated that the reduction in support will need to increase to 20%.

7.21 This alternative proposal will help mitigate the cut in Council Tax Support arising from the Government proposals, whilst continuing to ensure a sustainable Scheme is operated. This proposal therefore benefits both households and the Council. This proposal however would not provide a discretionary fund as these resources need to be allocated to reduce the cut in support from 20% to 15%.

7.22 This proposal would be more favourable than the proposed schemes by the Tees Valley authorities, which it is expected will implement cuts of 20%. On the other hand the proposal will be less generous than the proposal in Durham and Northumberland, where it is expected no cuts will be implemented in 2013/14. Some concerns have been expressed that implementing a lower cut in Hartlepool may lead to people moving to Hartlepool. This is considered a low risk as there will be many factors influencing someone's decision to move area, including the level of Council Tax Support, the actual level of Council Tax, the costs of moving and ties to a particular area.

7.23 Adopting this option will commit part of the resources set aside from the budget outturn strategy for 2011/12 as a sum of £1.197m was earmarked to assist the Council to deal with the risks associated with implementing a LCTS Scheme. Financial Modelling indicates that by implementing a cut in CTS entitlements of 15% covering the financial years 2013/14 to 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17 about half of this earmarked reserve, £0.67m will be required to ensure a sustainable scheme as shown in the table below. It is recommended the remaining balance of £0.527m is retained to manage the financial risks arising from Council Tax Support transferring to the Council, particularly the risk of claimant numbers increasing over the period of the MTFS.

	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	
Net Funding Gap	0.68	0.71	1.0	1.3	
Saving from cut in CTS Support 15% for 3 years then 20%	(0.67)	(0.69)	(0.71)	(0.95)	
Required contribution from Reserve	0.01	0.02	0.29	0.35	0.67

7.24 Option 3 - Implement an 8.5% reduction for 2013/14 and 15% for 2014/15 and 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17

7.25 A detailed financial assessment of limiting the cut in existing support to 8.5% was completed on the basis of the forecasts underpinning the original financial model reported to Cabinet in September. These forecasts were based on annual Council Tax increases over the period of the MTFS of 2.5%. On the basis of this assessment it was determined that limiting the cut in CTS to 8.5% was not viable as this would result in an additional unbudgeted General Fund budget pressure.

7.26 Further analysis has now been completed on the impact of reducing the proposed Council Tax increase to 2% and the scope to limit the cut in existing Council Tax support to 8.5% for 2013/14. This analysis shows that after reflecting the lower costs of providing Council Tax Support arising from the lower Council Tax increase in 2013/14 and 2014/15 and the additional **one-off grant** of £0.26m which will be received from the Government by limiting the cut to 8.5% that the Council would face a one off cost unfunded cost of £0.16m.

7.27 If this option is adopted the Council would still need to implement a 15% reduction in 2014/15 and the costs of operating the scheme over the period 2013/14 to 2016/17 would be the same as under option 2. Therefore, the Council would still need to allocate £0.67m of the

APPENDIX A

resources set aside from the 2011/12 outturn strategy of £1.197m to assist the Council to deal with the risks associated with implementing a LCTS Scheme to maintain the cut at 15%. It is recommended the remaining balance of £0.527m is retained to manage the financial risks arising from Council Tax Support transferring to the Council, particularly the risk of claimant numbers increasing over the period of the MTFS.

7.28 Adopting this option would require the Council to fund the one-off additional costs of £0.16m in 2013/14. It is not recommended that this is funded from the uncommitted risk reserve of £0.527m, as this would reduce the Council's ability to manage any in-year increases in Council Tax Support cuts. This money needs to be maintained to manage this risk and avoid any costs falling on the General Fund, as it is expected that cuts in the core Formula Grant may be more than forecast. This risk has increased following the Chancellor announcement on 5th December 2013 that additional grant cuts of 2% will be made to Local Government funding in 2014/15.

7.29 An alternative strategy is therefore needed to fund the additional one-off cost of £0.16m. It is recommended that this cost is funded from the Supporting Family Poverty Reserve. This proposal would leave a balance on the Supporting Family Poverty Reserve of £0.149m, net of this contribution and the monies allocated for the Food Bank.

7.30 Many councils are considering implementing LCTS schemes that will involve cuts in awards of 20% or more. By implementing a scheme based on either a 15% cut, or an 8.5% for 2013/14 and then increasing in 2014/15 to a 15% cut Hartlepool would demonstrate that the Council recognises the challenges faced by those dependent on welfare support, the impacts on the wider local economy and has developed a balanced sustainable solution.

7.31 As reported previously whatever cut is implemented there is still a risk that actual costs of providing Council Tax Support exceed the budget forecast, particularly if unemployment increases. The proposals for options 2 and 3 maintain an uncommitted risk reserve of around £0.53m, which will help the Council manage any in-year cost pressure. This would provide a longer lead time to develop a permanent solution if the cost increase is permanent.

7.32 Impact on households of LCTS cut of 15% or an 8.5% cut in 2013/14 only

7.33 The majority, 96%, of existing Council Tax Benefit working age claimants which will be affected by the Government cut in funding reside in Band A and B properties. Claimants fall into two distinct groups:

- **Passported** - cases that currently receive full Council Tax Benefit i.e. households in receipt of DWP Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based) or Employment and Support Allowance

APPENDIX A

(Income Based). There are about 6,000 households in the borough that will be affected by the LCTS that fall within the Passported group;

- Non Passported - current council tax benefit claimant households that receive part Council Tax Support. There are about 2,600 households in this category.

7.34 The following table illustrates the impact of a 15% cut on average for each group for those households living in a Band A or B property. As a LCTS award will continue to be a means tested benefit, the actual level of support will be dependent on each household's particular financial circumstances.

Average Impacts of a 15% Cut in LCTS Entitlement

	Passported Number Impacted	Passported cases Average Amount to pay.	Non Passported Number Impacted	Non Passported cases Average Amount extra to pay.
		£ pa		£ pa
Band A	5,476	138	2,110	103
Band B	381	164	278	110

As the level of awards under the current Council Tax Benefit scheme are higher for passported cases than non passported cases, the application of a flat rate of cut on the size of awards will have a greater impact on passported cases.

7.35 Option 3 would reduce the cuts in support for 2013/14 as follows:

Average Impacts of an 8.5% Cut In LCTS Entitlement for 2013/14 ONLY

	Passported Number Impacted	Passported cases Average Amount to pay.	Non Passported Number Impacted	Non Passported cases Average Amount extra to pay.
		£ pa		£ pa
Band A	5,476	78	2,110	58
Band B	381	93	278	62

7.36 Impact on Households of other Welfare Reform Changes in addition to a new LCTS Scheme

7.37 A range of Welfare Reform revisions are being implemented by the Government, changes to the system of housing benefit for private rented sector tenants have already been actioned. From April 2013 new under occupancy “bedroom tax” rules are being introduced for social rented sector tenants from April 2013.

7.38 The Council's Benefits Service has been working closely with registered social landlords (RSL's) to identify those households at risk of being affected by the Government's under occupancy rules which apply only to those of working age. There are about 1,650 households that are at risk from the change, of which 1,270 will potentially see a 14% reduction in their housing benefit entitlement with a further 380 households at risk of a 25% reduction in their housing benefit.

7.39 Whilst the level of housing benefit loss will vary between households, Housing Hartlepool have estimated that for a typical 3 bedroom property a 14% reduction (under occupancy by 1 bedroom) the loss in benefit will be £11.87 per week, a 25% reduction (under occupancy by 2 bedrooms) the loss in benefit will be £21.65 per week.

7.40 The RSL's have been engaging with their tenants at risk of these changes providing advice and support. The Council plans to supplement the current engagement process by issuing a letter in mid January 2013 to all households at risk based on latest available data.

7.41 Simultaneously from next April, a system of government Benefit Caps will be implemented which will restrict the maximum amount of state help for housing and living expenses to £26,000 pa for couples and single parent families and £18,200 pa for single individuals. Using data provided by the DWP, the Council's Benefits Service have identified 140 households that are at risk from the Benefit Cap rules. All households affected have received face to face visits by either the Benefits Service or from the Families Information Support service (FISH). The financial impact will vary between households but indications are that housing benefit will be cut on average by about £66 per week from April 2013.

7.42 The effect of the wider welfare reforms is that individual households will be impacted by one or more of the changes. The compounding impact on some households of the reforms will be significant.

7.43 The announcement by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement on 5th December 2012 that most working-age benefits will rise by 1% for each of the next 3 years will also impact on households.

8. Operational issues associated with the introduction of a LCTS scheme and other Welfare Reform changes

8.1 A further report will be submitted to Cabinet in January detailing proposal for managing the impact of the reductions in CTS support. These proposals will cover potential additional capacity within the Revenue/Benefits team and the Contact Centre to manage customer contacts when these changes are implemented. This will ensure people are dealt with quickly and efficiently as possible, which will be important given the impact of the changes. Similarly, this report is also examining the need to additional Welfare Advice services in the community. These additional issues may require additional financial resources and it may be possible to fund this from the 2013/14 outturn without impacting on the outturn proposal detailed in the MTFS.

8.2 From April 2013, the Council will need to collect new or small amounts of Council Tax from 8,600 working age households, which equates to a 15% increase in the number of households the Council will need to collect Council Tax from. Increased collection capacity may become a budget pressure in future years, although every effort will be made to manage the increased workloads within existing resources.

8.3 In addition, impact modelling has been undertaken by officers of the potential increase in customer contacts both face to face and by telephone, the associated resourcing needs and the accommodation logistics as part of a response plan. The detailed response plan is being developed and will consider:

- staggering the issue of blocks of correspondence to help smooth out levels of customer contact.
- operating revised telephone call handing arrangements and deploying increased temporary resources within the Revenues and Benefits services back office functions
- increasing capacity for face to face enquiries within Hartlepool Connect including triage arrangements
- improving levels of security cover within the Civic Centre
- engaging with external advice agencies to ensure a co-ordinated response and consistent messages
- the delivery of community out reach advice services

The Response Plan is currently being finalised and will be reported to Members at a later date, however initial evaluation indicates that the additional customer demand resources can be funded from a projected

underspend within the Chief Executive's Departmental budget in 2012/13.

- 8.4 As part of the council's communication arrangements with those affected by the changes, 1,650 letters will be issued in Mid January 2013 to those households at risk from the under occupancy rules as set out in section.
- 8.5 The Council will also issue a LCTS impact letter to those households affected by the local scheme in 2 tranches each comprising 4,300 letters in the weeks commencing 4th and 11th February 2013. The resource implications of dealing with the enquiries associated with these new communications as well as those enquiries in response to the issue in March 2013 of Council Tax Bills (especially to those who have not paid Council Tax in the past), 2013/14 Council Tax Support entitlement letters and 2013/14 annual Housing benefit entitlement letters will all be factored into the overarching Response Plan.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 9.1 In accordance with statutory responsibilities an Equality Impact Assessment of the proposals outlined in the report has been completed and is included as an appendix.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Government's decision to replace the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme with a local Council Tax Support scheme from April 2013 will transfer a significant additional financial risk to councils. This would be an extremely challenging change in normal circumstances for councils to manage. However, managing this change with a headline national funding reduction of 10% and against a background of continued economic uncertainty will be extremely challenging.
- 10.2 The Government's financial model assumes that demand for Council Tax support will reduce over the next two years. This is unlikely in the short-term owing to current economic conditions. The Governor of the Bank of England recently indicated the UK economy will have zero growth in 2012 and then lower growth than previously anticipated in the following few years. The Chancellor's Autumn statement and information from the Office of Budget Responsibility also confirmed the poor economic outlook.
- 10.3 For Hartlepool the initial grant cut is 12.2%, which reflects higher anticipated Council Tax Benefit costs in 2013/14 based on existing claimant levels and forecast increases in council tax in 2013/14, which are not reflected in the Government's forecasts and provisional grant allocations. Many other councils particularly those serving deprived communities are forecasting similar initial grant cuts. This funding shortfall will increase in future years as the grant councils receive from

the Government towards the cost of Local Council Tax Support schemes will be frozen in cash terms.

10.4 When account is taken of the statutory requirement to protect low income pensioners, a principle Cabinet has previously indicated they support, the Council faces an unavoidable and extremely difficult decision about how the Government grant cut is managed.

10.5 Cabinet has previously indicated that owing to the existing General Fund budget deficits that the CTB grant cut will need to be funded by implementing a Local Council Tax Scheme within the reduced funding allocation. The scale of this cut has been partly mitigated by the proposed changes to existing Council Tax exemptions and the pressure included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2013/14 and 2014/15. Without these measures a cut of 30% would have been required.

10.6 The changes to CTB will be challenging for councils serving communities with relatively high levels of deprivation, including Hartlepool where 1 in every 3 households is currently receiving some level of support with their council tax bills. These changes will impact directly on the individual and the local economy from reduced spending power.

10.7 The main risks from these changes to the Council's financial position will be:

- the impact of increased in-year demand which will need to be funded from the risk reserve of £1.197m (established from the 2011/12 outturn strategy) or the General Fund budget, as once a local Council Tax Scheme is set it cannot be changed until the following year; and
- the impact on Council Tax collection rates and the costs of collection from a significant increase in the number of households Council Tax payments need to be collected from. Many of these households will be receiving a Council Tax bill for the first time as a local Council Tax Scheme will not cover the full cost of Council Tax.

10.8 This report outlines 3 options for managing this change and recommends that the Council can either implement

- Option 2 - a 15% reduction in existing support for households currently receiving Council Tax Benefit for 2013/14 to 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17, OR
- Option 3 - an initial 8.5% reduction in existing support for households currently receiving Council Tax Benefit for 2013/14, increasing to 15% for 2014/15 and 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17

- 10.9 If Members determine to implement option 3 one-off costs in 2013/14 of £0.16m will need to be funded from the Supporting Family Poverty Reserve.
- 10.10 These proposals do not impact on low income pensioners which councils are required to protect.
- 10.11 The proposed schemes assume Members approve the other principles detailed in section 6.
- 10.12 This recommended course of action will enable the Council to implement a sustainable scheme for the period of the current MTFs 2013/14 to 2016/17. The scheme will need to be reviewed on an annual basis to reflect changing economic conditions and Government funding allocation for 2015/16 and future years which are currently unknown. This will include close monitoring to ensure actual claimant numbers and collection rates are in line with planning forecasts as any variances will either require the Council to revise the local scheme for future years, or result in an additional General Fund budget pressure.
- 10.13 Both option 2 and 3 will require the use of £0.67m of the LCTS transition reserve and it is recommended that the remaining balance of £0.527m is maintained to manage financial risk in 2013/14. This position can then be reviewed during 2013/14.
- 10.14 In terms of the impact of reducing the cut in support from 20% to 15% (with a one year reduction in 2013/14 to 8.5%) this will enable the Council to provide some protection for households affected by the Government change. Many of these households will also be affected by other welfare reform changes. The announcement by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement on 5th December 2012 that most working-age benefits will rise by 1% for each of the next 3 years, will also impact on households.
- 10.15 If full Council does not approve a LCTS scheme by the 31st January 2013 this will require the Council to adopt the default scheme for 2013/14 and this will result in an unbudgeted gross pressure of £1.38m and a net deficit of £0.68m. This situation needs to be avoided as the net deficit would commit a significant element of the available one off funding and the Council would then need to implement a 20% cut in 2014/15 and would have no funding for discretionary support as uncommitted one off funding would need to be allocated to manage risks.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves one of the following options to be referred to full Council for approval:

- Option 2 - a 15% reduction in existing support for households currently receiving Council Tax Benefit for 2013/14 to 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17, OR
- Option 3 - an initial 8.5% reduction in existing support for households currently receiving Council Tax Benefit for 2013/14, increasing to 15% for 2014/15 and 2015/16 and increasing to 20% in 2016/17

11.2 If Option 2 is approved by Cabinet the following supporting recommendations will need to be referred to full Council:

- i) Approve the implementation of the reduced Council Tax exemptions detailed in paragraph 4.5 (and summarised below) and the allocation of the resulting additional income to partly mitigate the impact of the Government Council Tax Benefit grant cut in 2013/14 and future years;
 - Implement Principle 2 – Increase Non Dependant Deductions in line with Government increases;
 - Implement a lower capital/savings threshold -Principle 3;
 - Implement measures to encourage work Principle 4;
 - Implement changes to streamline / simplify the administration of a local CTS scheme -Principle 5;
 - Maintain the existing local war widow / war pension disregards -Principle 6;
- ii) Approve the application of £0.67m of the one-off Council Tax Scheme Transitional Support Reserves of £1.197m to partly mitigate the impact of the Government Council Tax Benefit grant cut over the period 2013/14 to 2016/17;
- iii) Approve that the balance on Transitional Support Reserve of £0.527m be earmarked to manage risks associated with the LCTS in 2013/14 and future years;
- iv) To note that the approved Local Council Tax Support Scheme will be subject to annual review and approval by full Council;
- v) To note that in accordance with National regulations approximately £1,200 of the Council Tax Support Grant will be passported to Parish Councils.

11.3 If Option 3 is approved by Cabinet the following supporting recommendations will need to be referred to full Council:

- i) Approve the implementation of the reduced Council Tax exemptions detailed in paragraph 4.5 (and summarised below) and the allocation of the resulting additional income to partly

APPENDIX A

mitigate the impact of the Government Council Tax Benefit grant cut in 2013/14 and future years;

- Implement Principle 2 – Increase Non Dependant Deductions in line with Government increases;
 - Implement a lower capital/savings threshold -Principle 3;
 - Implement measures to encourage work Principle 4;
 - Implement changes to streamline / simplify the administration of a local CTS scheme -Principle 5;
 - Maintain the existing local war widow / war pension disregards -Principle 6;
- ii) Approve the application of £0.67m of the one-off Council Tax Scheme Transitional Support Reserves of £1.197m to partly mitigate the impact of the Government Council Tax Benefit grant cut over the period 2014/15 to 2016/17;
- iii) Approve that the balance on Transitional Support Reserve of £0.527m be earmarked to manage risks associated with the LCTS in 2013/14 and future years;
- iv) Approve the use of £0.160m from the Supporting Family Poverty Reserve and to note this will leave an uncommitted balance of £0.149m;
- v) To note that the approved Local Council Tax Support Scheme will be subject to annual review and approval by full Council;
- v) To note that in accordance with National regulations approximately £1,200 of the Council Tax Support Grant will be passported to Parish Councils.

12. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 To enable Cabinet to approve a proposed Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2013/14 to be referred to full Council for approval.

13. APPENDICES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST, IN THE MEMBERS LIBRARY AND ON-LINE

- 13.1 Equality Impact Assessment.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1 Cabinet report 11 June 2012 – Localisation of Council Tax Benefit and 3rd September 2012 Localisation of Council Tax Support.

15. CONTACT OFFICER

John Morton
Assistant Chief Finance Officer
01429 523093
John.morton@hartlepool.gov.uk