

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

18 October 2013

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Christopher Akers-Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob Cook, Alison Lilley, Ray Martin-Wells, Robbie Payne, Carl Richardson, Chris Simmons and Paul Thompson.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 (ii), Councillor Allan Barclay was in attendance for Councillor Marjorie James, Councillor Kevin Cranney was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Peter Jackson and Councillor Geoff Lilley was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Keith Dawkins.

Also in attendance:

Dr Mark Reilly, Tees Valley Public Health Shared Service
Keith Bayley, Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency
Jackie Gettings, Epilepsy Outlook

Officers: Dave Stubbs, Chief Executive
Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Alyson Camen, Legal Services Manager
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Louise Wallace, Director of Public Health
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Children's Services
John Mennear, Assistant Director, Community Services
Graham Frankland, Assistant Director, Resources
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance, Corporate
Kerry Trenchard, Acting Performance and Partnerships Manager
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Steve Hilton, Public Relations Officer
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services Officer

121. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Keith Dawkins, Peter Jackson and Marjorie James.

122. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Christopher Akers-Belcher declared a prejudicial interest in minutes 124 and indicated he would leave the meeting during the consideration of that item.

Councillor Paul Thompson declared a prejudicial interest in minute 127 and indicated he would leave the meeting during the consideration of that item.

Councillors Allan Barclay, Kevin Cranney and Chris Simmons declared a personal interest in minute 124.

Councillors Allan Barclay, Rob Cook, Chris Simmons and Paul Thompson declared personal interests in minute 127.

123. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2013

Received.

Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher left the meeting at this point due to his earlier declaration of interest.

Councillor Carl Richardson in the Chair.

124. Community Pool Programme Allocation 2014/15

(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (i) and (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference RN20/13.

Purpose of report

To present a proposal and seek approval on the allocation of the Community Pool Programme Allocation for 2014/15.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods presented a detailed and comprehensive report which provided the background to the Community Pool Programme along with the proposed allocated budget to categories of the Community Pool for the programme delivery in 2014/15. It was noted that the level of reduction proposed to the Community Pool programme would have an impact on the organisations currently supported and Council Officers had been working with Voluntary and Community

Sector (VCS) organisations through monitoring and performance management meetings and it had been reiterated that there were no guarantees of future funding availability through the Community Pool programme. Impact assessments had been carried out and the key areas of impact were outlined in the report. Also included in the report were the risk implications of revising the current Community Pool programme allocations under the proposed reduced budget of £220,000. It was highlighted that the proposed saving demonstrated through the Community Pool allocation would contribute directly to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

At this point in the meeting, Councillors Alison Lilley, Geoff Lilley and Carl Richardson declared personal interests in this item.

A number of representatives from the VCS were in attendance and the Chair invited them to address the Committee.

A representative from the Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency (HVDA) commented that whilst he understood the challenges the Local Authority were facing through unprecedented budget reductions, he requested that further consideration be given to the impact of the proposed changes to the criteria, in particular in relation to people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups. A number of concerns were expressed that the proposed reductions would undermine the services provided by volunteers. A letter including further detail on the concerns expressed by the HVDA was provided for Members' consideration.

A representative from Epilepsy Outlook expressed concerns that the reduction in Community Pool funding would result in organisations being ineligible to apply for additional grant funding. A representative from Hartlepool Bereavement Service commented that reducing financial support to the voluntary organisations may put a further strain on the Council's budget due to the inevitable increased demand on the Local Authority's services in those areas.

A discussion ensued during which Members recognised the value of VCS organisations as key partners in providing various services across the town. However, the current budgetary pressures the Council was facing had to be acknowledged. It was suggested that alternative ways of supporting the VCS should be explored, such as the current scheme to provide business rate relief to voluntary organisations.

A Member referred to the letter provided by the HVDA and noted the level of funding secured through external sources to support VCS groups and it was suggested that without the support of the HVDA a lot of these groups would cease to exist. Concern was expressed that the level of cuts to the HVDA was disproportionate and that Category 3 should not be removed from the Community Pool funding programme. In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods confirmed that the HVDA could still apply for funding from within the

remaining Community Pool programme allocation.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods acknowledged that a number of very difficult decisions were needed in order to deal with the Council's current budgetary situation. It was noted that the Council had demonstrated its commitment to the priority of reducing family poverty by agreeing a reduced council tax increase of 8.5%, being the first Council to introduce bedroom tax support, implement free swims for children and young people and support the local food bank.

Whilst Members recognised the value of the work undertaken by the HVDA, the level of budget reductions required was unprecedented and would continue into future years. A Member commented that he was ashamed to live in a society that relied on food banks to support needy families adding that family poverty was a real issue in Hartlepool and this should be recognised. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods commented that as part of the negotiations on the ICT contract, a social value fund of £40k had been agreed and would be reported back to this Committee to consider the future use of that fund.

A representative from Advance, an organisation that worked with children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) commented that the Community and Voluntary Sector were finding it increasingly difficult to secure funding and requested that any cuts imposed should be proportionate. One of the young people in attendance confirmed that he and his family had received a lot of support from this particular organisation.

Decision

- (i) The content of the report and progress of the Community Pool Programme to date was noted.
- (ii) The proposed allocation of budget as set out in Table 1 of the report was approved.
- (iii) That Category 2 (Credit Union Support) be changed from a contract to a grant.
- (iv) That the maximum level of grants available be reduced to £10,000 for Category 4.
- (v) That the criteria for Category 4 grants be changed to link directly to the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan.
- (vi) That the allocation of any underspend in Category 5 from the 2013/14 budget should be allocated to Category 5 (A and B) in 2014/15.

Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher rejoined the meeting and returned to the Chair.

125. **Disposal of Surplus Assets – Capital Receipts Programme** *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods and Chief Finance Officer)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (i) and (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference RN13/09.

Purpose of report

To advise Committee of the progress to date in relation to the achievement of Capital Receipts and advise on the programme and options to secure the approve Capital Receipts target of £6.5 million by 2015/16.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report which provided the background to the financial plan that was developed to address the Government's withdrawal of grant funding to complete the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) projects. Members were referred to the decision taken by the Committee on 23 August 2013 in relation to the Brierton Scheme and an outline of the phasing of HMR expenditure was outlined in the report. Details on the phasing of capital receipts were provided in the report and within the appendices including Appendix 1 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))**. The report provided an outline of the linkage between capital expenditure commitments and forecast capital receipts including the phasing risk and the risk of achieving the capital receipts of £6.5m.

In conclusion, the report highlighted the continuing requirement to achieve capital receipts of £6.5m to fund approved capital expenditure commitments. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods highlighted the importance of monitoring the market to ensure the right sites were marketed at the right time to maximise the opportunity to achieve the capital receipt.

A Member questioned whether it was viable to secure planning permission for sites prior to putting them on the market to reduce the timescales for progressing the sale of the sites and whether developers were required to provide a deposit to confirm their intention to purchase the site. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods confirmed that where appropriate, the Council would secure planning permission for sites before being marketed, however it was noted that due to the complexities of the

market, it would not be in the Council's interest to restrict future development for all sites until the future use of those sites were confirmed. Members were informed that developers were now required to provide a 10% deposit to secure the sale of any Council owned land or property.

It was suggested that to aid Members' consideration of potential land sales in the future, a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee providing a schedule of land owned and leased out by the Council. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods confirmed that the report would also provide Members with the implications of securing planning permission on Council-owned sites identified for potential sale in the future.

Decision

- (i) That the report was noted.
- (ii) The proposal to market site C and complete the sale of site D as noted in Appendix 1 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))** was approved.
- (iii) The proposed delay marketing sites E and F as noted in Appendix 1 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))** until future years depending on market conditions was approved.
- (iv) The proposals that if tenders for site C as noted in Appendix 1 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))** do not realise an acceptable value that either the sales of site E and F noted in Appendix 1 be brought forward.
- (v) The prudence of recommendations (ii) and (iii) in managing the release of land to the market to avoid oversupply and maximise returns in a rising market was acknowledged.
- (vi) It was noted that by adopting the above strategy, it was anticipated that the Council will need to manage Capital Receipts shortfall in 2013/14 of £2.095m pending the achievement of capital receipts in 2014/15. It was anticipated that the resulting temporary revenue costs in 2013/14 and 2014/15 of using Prudential Borrowing can be accommodated within existing budgets.
- (vii) That Council approval be sought to increase the 2013/14 Prudential Borrowing limits by £2.095m as part of the 2014/15 budget proposals

in February 2013.

- (viii) It was noted that by adopting the above strategy, it was anticipated that the Council will need to manage Capital Receipts shortfall in 2015/16 of £0.860m pending the achievement of capital receipts in 2016/17. It may be necessary to earmark revenue resources to temporarily fund the forecast Prudential Borrowing costs when the position is more certain to avoid an unbudgeted revenue pressure in 2015/16.
- (ix) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee providing a schedule of land owned and leased out by the Council and the potential implications of securing planning permission for the future use of these sites.

126. Leasing of Land to a Wind Turbine Developer for the Erection of Wind Turbines on Land at Brenda Road (Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (i) and (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference RN18/12.

Purpose of report

To report on the tenders for lease of land at Brenda Road for Wind Turbine installation and operation.

Issue(s) for consideration

Following a decision by Members in October 2012 land at Brenda Road had been marketed to let as a wind turbine site. Tenders closed on 12 July 2013 and six had been received. There were detailed in Appendix 2 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) para 3)**. It was noted that due to the complexities of wind turbine planning, the assessment of the tenders had not been straightforward with proposals ranging from the construction of one relatively small 0.5 MW turbine with a tip height of approximately 77 metres to a much larger 7.5 MW turbine with a tip height of almost 200 metres. It was noted that the rental income offered by the various tenderers varied greatly depending on the size of the schemes. However, the tenders had been formally evaluated in accordance with the tender document and the results were set out in Appendix 3 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely information relating to the financial or business**

affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) para 3).

Members were informed that based on the evaluation criteria in the tender documentation, Tender 6 scored the highest as this tender provided the highest financial return and one of the fastest implementation timescales.

In response to a question from a Member, the Legal Services Manager confirmed that taking part in this decision would not preclude Members from participating in considerations at a future Planning Committee in relation to this particular development.

Whilst Members recognised that the planning regulations in relation to wind turbines were complex, they were supportive of the scheme on this particular site.

Decision

- (i) That tender 6 as included in Appendix 2 **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) para 3)** was approved and consent granted for detailed negotiations to be undertaken to agree Exclusivity and Option Agreements.
- (ii) It was noted that one planning permission had been obtained, a lease would be granted for the construction and operation of a wind turbine scheme at the site.
- (iii) It was noted that once planning permission had been obtained and a scheme implemented, the Council would achieve a new income stream for a 25 year period, which it was anticipated would commence in 2015/16. The income would help reduce the significant budget deficit facing the Council in 2015/16 which would be the most difficult financial year the Council will have ever faced.
- (iv) It was noted that one planning permission had been obtained and a scheme implemented, the Council would achieve a separate contribution towards a Community Benefit Fund.

Councillor Paul Thompson left the meeting at this point due to his earlier declaration of interest.

127. Savings Proposals for Early Intervention Services
(Assistant Director, Children's Services)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (i) and (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference

CAS13/13.

Purpose of report

To identify proposals for the delivery of savings in respect of the Early Intervention Grant for consideration in the context of significant cuts to this grant in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's Services presented a report which provided the background to the Early Intervention Strategy. Attached at Appendix 1 was a summary of the current budget commitments, which red/amber/green rated the proposed savings and underpinned the narrative contained within the report.

The Assistant Director went on to outline the proposed savings to be achieved and as set out in detail in the report. The table below summarised the proposed savings: -

Service	Proposed Savings	Staffing Implications
Reduce Marketing budget	£30,000	
Early Years Foundation Stage Quality Improvement	£50,208	1.2 post
Reduce Childcare budget	£37,291	
Short Breaks	£68,456	
Small Steps School Assistant	£23,000	1 post
Remove Band 13 Principal Practitioner post	£47,386	1 post
Reduction in Children's Centre operating costs	£88,062	
Rationalisation of staffing group	£161,386	1 post
Reduce family budgets	£10,000	
Remove Healthy Eating Early Years settings post	£34,366	1 post
Reduce staffing in Rainbow Café	£20,240	1 post
Renegotiating IT system fees and reducing central costs	£28,000	
Income generation of participation team	£30,000	
Closure of Brinkburn and Jutland Road Youth Clubs	£103,000	14 staff 3.6 FTE's
Reduction in sessional hours	£95,000	All youth centre workers will have 30 minute

		reduction in working time.
Reduction of 1 Youth Work Manager post	£41,000	1 post
Remove YCAP element of the grant	£169,814	Further work required re delivered in house or commissioned
Reduce Youth Opportunities Fund	£80,000	
Cease funding additional Speech and Language Services	£120,000	
Transfer substance misuse service to Public Health	£122,000	
Reduce mentoring and activities contract value by 10%	£48,000	
Transfer parenting service in house	£105,000	TUPE will apply
Total Proposed Savings	£1,512,209	

A number of other savings had been considered in the development of the above savings proposals, however they had been discounted primarily due to the potential impact they had on service delivery and the risks associated with realising the savings. Further detail was included in the report. Initial projections indicated that there was likely to be around £350,000 underspend on this year's budget and it was suggested that these unused reserves be carried forward to underpin the delivery of these cuts and manage financial risks during 2014/15. However, it was recommended that commitments against this reserve be reviewed during 2014/15 to ensure any uncommitted balance on this reserve was developed as part of the 2015/16 budget.

The Chair of the Children's Services Committee informed Members that the Committee had considered the recommendations and made the following comments:

- the changes to youth service provision at Jutland Road through further discussions with the provider of services to extending the age range of services to match the statutory age range imposed on the council;
- the changes to the Young Peoples Inspections in light of the comments made by the young peoples representatives in relation to the charges made for their inspections; and
- that the 50% reduction in services provided through Families First be reconsidered.

The Chair of the Children's Services Committee concluded that he was astounded that the Government were seeking cuts to the Early Intervention Services which provided support to families to prevent young people

enduring poverty. Whilst Members acknowledged it was regrettable that these savings proposals were needed, Officers were thanked for their hard work and commitment to finding the least painful way of identifying the savings when faced with such devastating cuts to budgets. Additionally, it was noted that a number of teams had been reconfigured with a view to providing more efficient ways of working and everyone involved was thanked for making these changes work.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Kevin Cranney declared a personal interest in this item.

A Member commented that there was a real need to continue to provide services in the Jutland Road area as this had always been a deprived community. Members were saddened at the need to make savings in these areas as the work carried out under the Early Intervention Strategy provided invaluable support to people and families in this area. It was noted that a further report would be provided to the Children's Services Committee on the changes in support services provided in this locality.

It was noted that a proposed saving of £30k from a reduction in the marketing budget was included and a Member questioned whether the whole of this budget could be included in the proposed savings. The Chair informed Members that he had queried this with the Department and been informed that the breadth of work achieved through this marketing budget was vast with huge outcomes. It was also noted that it was a statutory requirement of the receipt of the Early Intervention Grant that a proportion of the grant was utilised for marketing services. Further clarification on this issue was requested, and it was suggested that this particular proposed saving be deferred pending the provision of further detailed information on the detail and outcomes of the remaining marketing budget.

Decision

- (i) That with the exception of the reduction in the marketing budget which was deferred pending further information, the proposals for savings outlined in the report were approved to manage the cuts to the Early Intervention Grant, including the request from the Children's Services Committee that further discussion take place on the following:
 - a) the changes to youth service provision at Jutland Road, with the current provider of services, to extending the age range of services to match the statutory age range imposed on the Council;
 - b) the changes to the Young People's Inspections in light of the comments made by the young people's representatives in relation to the charges made for their inspections; and
 - c) that the 50% reduction in services provided through Families First be reconsidered.
- (ii) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Finance and

Policy Committee detailing the proposed marketing budget and the outcomes and purpose of this budget.

- (iii) That the carry forward of the unused Early Intervention Grant Reserves of £350,000 to manage financial risks of delivering the savings programme in 2014/15 was approved, and these issues be referred to full Council in February 2014 as part of the final budget proposals for 2014/15.
- (iv) It was noted that the commitments against the £350,000 Early Intervention Grant reserve will be reviewed during 2014/15 as the savings were implemented which will then enable a strategy for using any uncommitted balance on this reserve to be developed as part of the 2015/16 budget.
- (v) It was noted that Children's Services Committee had referred the decision on discontinuing the early intervention speech and language contract to the Health and Wellbeing Board for consideration of impact and how this could be mitigated

Councillor Paul Thompson rejoined the meeting.

128. Presentation – Cold Kills *(Director of Public Health)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To provide the opportunity for Finance and Policy Committee to consider the proposed Outcome Framework and service planning timetable for 2014/15.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Public Health introduced Dr Reilly from the Tees Valley Public Health Shared Service who was in attendance to provide a presentation on 'Cold Kills'. The presentation considered in detail the impact of cold on health and welfare and it was noted that the local excess winter death index was not any worse than nationally, but neither the national nor the local index has improved much in the last decade. Members were informed that cold weather was the cause of more deaths than things regarded as important, such as breast cancer, road traffic accidents and suicide. Age was a major factor in excess winter deaths with people aged over 85 years of age more likely to die from excess winter death than those under 65 years of age. In addition, people with chest diseases were more likely to be affected by the cold than people suffering with circulatory diseases.

A number of ways individuals can help themselves during cold weather were included in the presentation along with what the Local Authority and the wider community could do. It was highlighted that in the north east region, spending on energy improvements was higher than average in Hartlepool. Members were informed that Cleveland Fire Authority were very proactive in prevention strategies in relation to cold weather and had made a number of referrals through the Cleveland Fire Authority Winter Warmth Team.

A Member questioned whether there was any significant difference to whether the older generation were using heating within their homes in light of recent increases in energy tariffs. Dr Reilly confirmed that two things influence excess winter deaths; severity of winter along with outbreaks of influenza and it was noted that excess winter deaths increase almost continuously as the temperature reduces. It was noted that the cold weather payments only take effect once the temperature is below 0 degrees for at least 7 consecutive days.

Members were encouraged to note the proactive involvement of Cleveland Fire Authority. It was noted that the issue of families in poverty was a key issue in excess winter deaths and the importance of ensuring children were not born into poverty linked into the Early Intervention Strategy discussed earlier on the agenda.

A Member sought clarification on the take-up of the influenza vaccinations within GPs surgeries. Dr Reilly informed Members that NHS England are now in place to support GPs surgeries to improve take up of vaccinations and reduce variations in clinical care as well as to understand the reasons for the differences. It was noted that some GP practices in Stockton on Tees achieved 100% take up rate and the importance raising awareness, ease of access to the clinical centre and reinforcing good quality care would help achieve this on a wider basis. The Director of Public Health confirmed that as the Local Authority now had the duty to protect the health of the local population and ensure screening immunisation rates improved, a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to examine this in more detail.

In relation to fuel poverty, a Member suggested that additional support should be provided to families and individuals to help them secure the best deal from their energy supplier. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods confirmed that the Energy Switching Campaign which the Council had recently taken part in had resulted in 1,000 hits but only 167 people actually switched suppliers. In addition to this, the Council was involved in the Warm Up North Campaign to insulate homes and advice and guidance on this was provided through the Council's Contact Centre. The Assistant Chief Executive added that the Council had recently signed up to 'Go On North East' a campaign aimed at enhancing the skills of people within local communities to use computers. Members were informed that as part of the negotiations around the ICT Contract, there may be an opportunity to explore ways of supporting local communities to

improve their ICT skills but this would be subject to a separate discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Public Health indicated that copies of the presentation would be forwarded to all Members.

It was suggested that the inclusion of a greater energy efficiency level could be incorporated into future planning applications for new dwellings to aspire to more energy efficient homes as this would pay dividends in the future.

Decision

- (i) The presentation was noted.
- (ii) That the presentation be circulated to all Members.

129. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs referred to below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 130 – (Hartlepool Maritime Experience – Catering Marketing Opportunity) – Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods – This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3).

130. Hartlepool Maritime Experience – Catering Marketing Opportunity *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)* **This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (para 3)**

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To inform Members of the recent developments in relation to the existing catering leaseholder at the Hartlepool Maritime Experience (HME) and to consider a way forward.

Issue(s) for consideration

Further details were included in the exempt section of the minutes.

Decision

The decision was included in the exempt section of the minutes.

The meeting returned to open session.

131. Service Planning 2014/15 *(Corporate Management Team)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To provide the opportunity for Finance and Policy Committee to consider the proposed Outcome Framework and service planning timetable for 2014/15.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Chief Executive presented a report which provided the background to the Council's Service Planning Framework and Outcome Framework 2014/15 across the following areas:

- Jobs and the Economy
- Lifelong Learning and Skills
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Safety
- Environment
- Housing
- Culture and Leisure
- Strengthening Communities
- Organisational Development

The timetable and key steps to progress the Council Plan were outlined in

the report.

Decision

- (i) The proposed Outcome Framework as set out in the report was approved.
- (ii) The overall timetable as set out in the report was approved.

132. Access to Payday Lenders Websites Blocked on all Council Computers *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To seek approval to block access to Payday Lender websites on all Council computers used by staff, Members and the public.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Chief Executive presented a report which provided the background to the trading practices of Payday lenders and the investigations undertaken by the Competition Commission. Members were informed that during the course of the year, an increasing number of Councils had taken steps to prevent access to Payday lenders websites. It was proposed that in light of current investigations and the desire of the Council to support sustainable ways of managing finances, that Hartlepool Borough Council implement measures to prevent access to all Payday lender websites on all Council computers.

A discussion ensued during which the Assistant Chief Executive and Legal Services Manager confirmed that whilst the technical ability to block access to any website was available, the Council needed to be impartial and in the instance of Payday lender websites, there was a very good rationale behind the proposal to block them. It was reiterated that anyone accessing Council computers must sign up to clear guidelines on the use of those computers and the internet and this was reinforced regularly.

The Assistant Chief Executive added that information signposting local residents and staff to local Credit Unions, Citizens Advice, the Money Advice Service and national debt and housing charity websites would be included on the Council's website to provide alternative options to Payday lenders.

Decision

The access restriction to Payday lenders websites was approved as part of a co-ordinated programme aimed at raising awareness regarding the dangers of payday loans and promoting alternative solutions by signposting local credit unions and debt advice websites.

133. Impact of a Hartlepool Living Wage on Commissioning Arrangements *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, Director of Child and Adult Services and Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To present details relating to the implementation of a Hartlepool Living Wage and its impact on commissioning arrangements.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods presented a report which provided the background to the Council's approach to the 'Living Wage'. It was noted that whilst the adoption of the Living Wage was currently quite low, the principle of a living wage was more widely accepted.

It was noted that the Council currently operated a significant number of contracts which had a range of termination dates. If the Living Wage was mandated, it was highly likely that such negotiations would result in an increased cost to the Council as suppliers were unlikely to voluntarily absorb the costs of such a change in their contract terms. It was therefore suggested that the Council adopt an approach based on encouragement to implement the Living Wage initiative throughout its supply chain and to particularly encourage other Hartlepool employers to pay our Hartlepool Living Wage to their employees.

During the discussions that followed, a Member requested that information on the number of current providers who was and who was not already paying the 'Living Wage'. In addition, a Member commented that the 'Living Wage' policy should be embraced as part of the renewal of all the Council's contracts. It was therefore suggested that as part of the renewal of all Council contracts over the next 6-12 months, suppliers be asked whether they pay the 'Living Wage' to their employees.

Decision

- (i) That the 'encouragement' approach to addressing the Living Wage in its commissioning arrangements through supplier chains was approved.
- (ii) That other Hartlepool employers be encouraged to pay our Hartlepool Living Wage to their employees.
- (iii) That as part of the renewal of all contracts over the next 6-12 months, suppliers be asked whether they pay the 'Living Wage' to their employees.
- (iv) That a report be submitted to the Committee in 12 months' time to review the take up of the Living Wage across the organisations involved in any Council contracts agreed over that period of time.

134. Reviewing the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To present an updated Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Strategy for the Committee to consider and agree. As part of this, the Committee will be asked to consider and agree a number of changes to the existing policy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Chief Executive presented a report which provided the background to the Council's Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Strategy. The Corporate Complaints Group had identified a number of amendments to the current policy to provide further clarity and ensure greater consistency in approach across the Council's Departments and reflect the capacity of staff to respond to complaints when there were received. The proposed changes were detailed in the report and included policy changes, the time limit for dealing with complaints, who complaints should be considered by and how the complaints performance should be monitored.

Decision

- (i) That all appeals be considered by the Chief Executive with support from the Corporate Complaints Officer.

- (ii) That an annual report, publicly available report be produced to comply with national guidelines on good practice and be subject to audit. This report will be presented to the Finance and Policy Committee along with a 6 monthly update report.
- (iii) The Complaints, Comments and Compliment Policy was approved for dissemination across the Authority once the above amendments were incorporated.

135. Strategic Financial Management Report – as at 31 August 2013 *(Corporate Management Team)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To inform Members of:

- (i) 2013/14 Forecast General Fund Outturn
- (ii) Corporate Income Collection
- (iii) Progress in achieving the capital receipts target; and
- (iv) 2013/14 Capital Programme Monitoring.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report which provided the background and reporting arrangements for the Strategic Financial Management report. The General Fund – Forecast Outturn 2013/14 was detailed in the report. It was noted that the contribution from the reserves review was a one off commitment of £631k.

The report provided further detail on:

- Creation of Departmental Reserves
- Corporate Income Collection
- Business Rates Income
- Council Tax
- Sundry Debts
- Progress against Capital Receipts Target
- Capital Monitoring
- Council Capital Fund (CCF)

In conclusion it was reiterated that the Council was facing greater financial challenges over the next three years than it has faced since becoming a unitary authority in 1996. The initial assessment of the forecast outturn in

May 2013 had enabled Members to address these issues by earmarking one off resources. However, the report provided an update on the initial outturn forecast for 2013/14 including those resources identified as part of the reserves review. The uncommitted underspend is projected at the year end of between £807,000 and £1,482,000 although it was not recommended that this amount was committed until the position on demand lead/seasonal budgets was more certain.

Decision

- (i) The report was noted.
- (ii) A decision on the potential use of the forecast uncommitted outturn of £807,000 to £1,482,000 was deferred until the position on demand lead/seasonable budget was more certain and the actual 2014/15 and 2015/16 Local Government Finance Settlement was known.
- (iii) The boiler replacement at Grayfields changing facilities at a cost of approximately £30,000 was approved and it was noted that this would be funded from the unallocated CCT Capital budget.
- (iv) That Council approval be sought to delay some works on the Civic Centre Capital Maintenance Project until 2014/15 to enable the boiler to be replaced at Christ Church Art Gallery at an estimated cost of £80,000 in the current year.

136. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

For Information.

Purpose of report

To satisfy the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules with regard to the Finance and Policy Committee:

- Receiving and examining quarterly reports on the outcome of contract letting procedures including those where the lowest/highest price was not payable/receiveable.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted to these Contract Procedure Rules.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Resources presented a report which included the information to be presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis. It was noted that Table A included the required information for each procurement

tender issued since the last quarter. Attached at Appendix B were the details of the required information in relation to Contract Procedure Rules exemptions granted since the last Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts. Attached by way of confidential appendix was the commercial information in respect of the tenders received **(This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information, para 3).**

Decision

The report was noted.

137. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 12.29

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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