

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE AGENDA



Friday 24 January 2014

at 9.30 am

in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

MEMBERS: FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

Councillors C Akers-Belcher, Cook, Dawkins, Jackson, James, A Lilley, Martin-Wells, Payne, Richardson, Simmons and Thompson

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee held on 3 January 2014 (*previously circulated*).

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

- 4.1 Local Council Tax Support 2014/15 – *Chief Finance Officer*

5. KEY DECISIONS

No items.

6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

No items.



7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

7.1 Individual Electoral Registration – *Chief Solicitor*

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – 31 January at 9.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool



FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

3 January 2014

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Christopher Akers-Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob Cook, Peter Jackson, Robbie Payne, Carl Richardson and Chris Simmons.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 (ii), Councillor Geoff Lilley was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Alison Lilley.

Also in attendance:

Edwin Jeffries and Steve Williams, HJTUC

Officers: Dave Stubbs, Chief Executive
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Louise Wallace, Director of Public Health
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services Officer

176. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Keith Dawkins, Alison Lilley and Ray Martin-Wells.

177. Declarations of Interest

None.

178. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2013

Received.

179. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2014/15 to 2016/17 - Update *(Corporate Management Team)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework.

Purpose of report

To provide an update on the impact of the 2014/15 Local Government Finance Settlement on the MTFS.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided details of the Local Government Finance Settlement announcement made by the Government on 18 December 2013 and the impact on the MTFS. Details were also provided of changes in local planning assumptions. The settlement covered two financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 and it was highlighted that Councils had until 15 January 2014 to submit responses on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. Set out in the report were the Core Revenue Grant cuts for 2014/15 and 2015/16 which are broadly in line with the planning forecasts and result in a cumulative grant cut since 2010/11 of £22.365m (28%) by 2014/15 and £30.578m (39%) by 2015/16. However, it was noted that in relation to 'Spending Power', due to the inclusion of other funding streams, the Council showed a reduction of 4.4% for 2014/15. The key issue for the Council was the level of the Core Revenue Grant cut included in the 'Spending Power' calculations as this was what had driven the budget cuts required over the next 3 years which were 9.6% for 2014/15 and 14.6% for 2015/16. Included in the report was a table which provided comparative Spending Power and Core Revenue percentage cuts for 2014/15 for England and the 12 North East Councils. It was noted that for 2015/16 Hartlepool's Spending Power cut was 4.7% compared to the average for England which was 1.8%. The Chief Finance Officer highlighted that the Core Revenue Grant cuts continue to have a disproportionate impact on Councils which were more dependent on grant funding as these cuts result in higher cash reductions and therefore greater cuts in services.

In relation to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS), it was reported that from 2014/15 a separate funding allocation would no longer be provided for LCTS schemes which would result in difficult policy decisions that individual Councils must now make on the use of the Core Revenue Grant. Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee on 29 November 2014, Members determined to consult on a 2014/15 LCTS cut of 12%. With regard to the 2015/16 LCTS scheme, the Committee agreed to share the grant cut

across the General Fund and the LCTS which would reduce the 2015/16 General Fund budget cuts by approximately £1.4m. The report outlined the Local Government Minister statement made in relation to the Council Tax freeze grant and referendum threshold.

The Chief Finance Officer indicated that due to the uncertainty over the 2014/15 New Homes Bonus (NHB) allocation, a prudent estimate was included in the MTFS forecasts with the actual allocation being £1.332m, which was £0.144m higher than the forecast.

Members were informed that the Statement announced that the small business rates multiplier would be capped at 2% with the Government providing a specific grant to compensate Councils as this was lower than the Retail Price Index of 3.2%.

There were a number of additional internal and external factors in relation to changes in Local Planning assumptions and these were outlined in the report. It was highlighted that the total permanent and one-off benefits would result in £1.281 being available to support the 2014/15 budget. It was recommended that this additional resource be used to continue the multi-year strategy to manage the Government grant cuts. Included at paragraph 6.8, was a table that showed the how this strategy would reduce the budget cuts required in 2015/16, which will be the most difficult financial year the Council has faced. The table showed the 2016/17 budget deficit based on a 10% grant cut as a worst case planning forecast. The December MTFS report had provided a forecast based on 7.5% grant cut which would reduce the 2016/17 deficit to £7.6m.

In conclusion, it was noted that the continuing Core Revenue grant cuts meant that the budget cuts identified for 2014/15 needed to be implemented to avoid deferring an unmanageable budget deficit until 2015/16 as this would be the most difficult year so far.

The Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Management Team's advice was to use the identified resources to continue the multi-year approach to managing the financial challenges facing the Council over the next 3 years. It was noted that it must be recognised that the proposed strategy for 2014/15 and 2015/16 would defer an additional budget deficit of £0.197m until 2016/17 and require savings in this year of up to £8.797m. However, the strategy would reduce the total forecast budget cuts in 2015/16 and 2016/17 from £16.4m to £14.8m, a reduction of £1.6m.

Members thanked the Chief Finance Officer for such a detailed and comprehensive report which had been produced in a very short timescale. A Member questioned the cost of a local Council Tax referendum and the Chief Solicitor indicated this would cost at least £70,000. The Chief Finance Officer highlighted a number of potential issues that may arise should a referendum be called.

Clarification was sought on the reduction in pension contributions to be

made by the Council. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that some employees will pay an increased pension contribution depending on their salary banding. However there would be protections in place for some lower paid staff reflecting the outcome of negotiations with Trades Unions on a national basis. In response to a question from a member of the public, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Teesside Pension Fund was currently one of the most robust in the country.

At this point in the meeting, Councillors Rob Cook, Geoff Lilley and Chris Simmons declared personal interests.

A Member sought clarification on the support available to low income pensions as part of the LCTS. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that people who were currently in receipt of council tax benefit would continue to be eligible for support in line with the identified income thresholds.

Decision

- (i) The provisional Core Revenue Grant cuts for 2014/15 and 2015/16 as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report were noted.
- (ii) The strategy recommended by the Chief Finance Officer and the Corporate Management Team for using the changes in planning assumptions identified since the December 2013 MTFS report to continue the multi-year strategy for managing the budget position over the period 2014/15 to 2016/17 as detailed in paragraph 6.8, table 2 was considered and approved.
- (iii) It was noted that this strategy would be incorporated into the final budget report to be referred to the Finance and Policy Committee to finalise the Budget and Policy Framework proposals to be referred to full Council.
- (iv) It was noted that owing to the timescale for responding to the Provisional 2014/15 Local Government Finance Settlement consultation, a response be agreed with the Leader.

180. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 2.35 pm

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 10 JANUARY 2014

FINANCE & POLICY COMMITTEE

24th January 2014



Report of: Chief Finance Officer

Subject: LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT 2014/15

1. TYPE OF DECISION / APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Budget and Policy Framework Decision

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purposes of the report are to:

- i) Update Members on the results of public consultation on a potential 12% LCTS scheme cut for 2014/15;
- ii) Update Members with the latest forecast data on Local Council Tax Support scheme (LCTS) costs and future Government funding as set out in the December settlement;
- iii) Enable Members to determine a LCTS 2014/15 scheme to be referred to full Council for a final decision as required by statute.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 An initial detailed report on the development of the 2014/15 LCTS scheme was considered by this Committee on 19th September 2013. The financial modelling in the September report was predicated on the Council being able to maintain an annual grant allocation towards the LCTS scheme of £9.6m over the financial years 2014/15 to 2017/18. There remained significant risks associated with the Government's plans to mainstream LCTS funding within the Core Revenue Grant from April 2014 and from future Government grant cuts.
- 3.2 The Government's proposal to mainstream the grant paid to support LCTS schemes within the Core Revenue Grant paid to Councils from 2014/15 is a key issue, particularly for those Councils which are more dependent on Government grant, such as Hartlepool. It would have been much clearer for Councils and the public if funding for LCTS schemes had continued to be paid as a specific grant. This arrangement would also have ensured the impact of the significant shift in responsibility for supporting low income households from Central to

Local Government was fully understood and properly resourced. The new arrangements have a significantly greater impact on Councils which are more dependent on Government grant and which serve more deprived communities.

- 3.3 In view of the mainstreaming of LCTS Government funding, individual Councils will need to determine how the available Core Revenue Grant is allocated between support for the LCTS scheme and support for the General Fund Budget.
- 3.4 A report on 29th November 2013 appraised Members with this information and proposed that for 2014/15 the Council continued with the existing grant allocations used for developing the 2014/15 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and 2014/15 LCTS Scheme as detailed strategies were already in place. However, it was recommended that Members consider reviewing the proposed 2014/15 LCTS scheme with a view to increasing the cut in support from 8.5%. The rationale behind this suggestion was:
- to re-phase the reduction in LCTS support as the 2015/16 LCTS cut will need to increase to 20%, two years earlier than previously forecast. This re-phasing should help households manage the requirement to pay higher amounts of Council Tax, albeit acknowledging this will be challenging for those households;
 - to enable the Council to share the future forecast grant cut across the General Fund and the LCTS scheme, to reduce the 2015/16 General Fund budget cuts by about £1.4m.
- 3.5 On 29th November 2013, Members approved the recommendation to consult on a potential 2014/15 LCTS scheme based on a 12% reduction and noted that the 2015/16 LCTS scheme will need to be based on a 20% reduction. The impact of this proposal on individual households together with the option of continuing with a 8.5% LCTS scheme in 2014/15 are shown below:

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
<u>Option agreed 19 Sept 2013</u>			
Reduction in LCTS Support	8.5%	8.5%	12.0%
<u>Annual Council Tax liability (based on 2013/14 Council Tax)</u>			
Band A	£95	£95	£135
Band B	£111	£111	£157
<u>Alternative Option proposed 29 Nov 2013</u>			
Reduction in LCTS Support	8.5%	12.0%	20.0%
<u>Annual Council Tax liability (based on 2013/14 Council Tax)</u>			
Band A	£95	£135	£225
Band B	£111	£157	£262

- 3.6 As reported previously the sustainability of the LCTS scheme at 20% beyond 2015/16 will need to be reviewed when details of grant allocations for 2016/17 and future years are known. If grant cuts continue beyond 2016/17 all Councils will face an increasingly challenging position balancing the allocation of available grant funding between support for the General Fund Budget and the LCTS scheme.
- 3.7 The Council is only able to avoid a 20% LCTS cut in 2014/15 as a result of previous decisions to earmark one off resources to assist with the implementation and operation of the Hartlepool LCTS Scheme.
- 3.8 The results of the consultation on a potential 12% LCTS scheme for 2014/15 are set out in section 4.

4. Public Consultation

- 4.1 A 2014/15 LCTS scheme based on a 12% cut whilst retaining all of the principles of the 2013/14 LCTS scheme (as detailed in Section 6) went out for formal consultation for a period of four weeks ending on 30th December 2013. The consultation exercise was publicised in the Hartlepool Mail and on the Council's website.
- 4.2 The consultation process used the Council's established arrangements via "Survey Monkey" which allows residents / interested parties the opportunity to complete questionnaires electronically, wherever they have an internet connection. In addition to the web based survey monkey, paper copies of the consultation were also available both from the Civic Centre and the Central Library and details of the consultation

were sent electronically to those individuals signed up to the Hartlepool Online Panel.

- 4.3 In total, 135 responses were received, which is not inconsistent with levels of response received for other Council consultations. 87% of responses were from people not currently receiving LCTS. The lack of engagement and participation by those most likely to be affected by the changes is similar to the 2013/14 LCTS Hartlepool consultation (where 86% of responses were from people not receiving support) and the experience of many other Councils.
- 4.4 Two principle questions were asked the results of which are set out in the table below:

2014/15 LCTS Cut 12% Consultation Results

Do you think this Level of Reduction (12%) is fair	Yes 60.4%	No 35.8%
How much do you agree or disagree with this reduction in support	Strongly Agree / Agree 55.6%	Disagree / Strongly Disagree 34.1%

Whilst recognising that the majority of respondents were non LCTS recipients, the consultation indicates a majority support for a 12% cut recognising an appreciation of the financial challenges and ongoing cuts in Government funding being faced by the Council.

5 2014/15 LCTS Scheme Financial Modelling

- 5.1 The replacement of the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme and associated funding arrangements with a Local Council Tax Support Scheme has transferred a significant ongoing financial risk to the Council, which will increase in future years given the impact of a range of factors which need managing:

- **Cuts in Government grant and the requirement to protect low income pensioner households.**

As reported previously, the Government has cut the amount of funding to Local Authorities to operate their LCTS schemes. In addition, for 2014/15 as set out earlier this funding is no longer provided as a separate allocation but is mainstreamed as part of the Core Revenue Grant leading to a loss of transparency on levels of Central Government funding for LCTS schemes.

- **Potential increases in demand for Council Tax Support.**

Hartlepool LCTS caseload levels are remaining broadly stable with the number of LCTS claimants as at December 2013 totalling approximately 15,000 (6,300 low income pensioners and 8,700 working age households). However, over time the numbers of older people eligible may increase owing to demographic pressures and low income pensioners must be protected within local schemes. Caseloads for working age adults will be affected by economic conditions.

- **The impact on Council Tax collection rates and the administration cost implications of collecting Council Tax associated with reduced help with Council Tax bills for low income households.**

This is a significant issue, the impact of which will increase over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Council operates effective arrangements for collecting Council Tax and in 2012/13 collected 97% of the annual Council Tax due, which is slightly above the Unitary and Metropolitan Authority average of 96.8%. Hartlepool Council Tax collection data for 2013/14 is positive and this position reflects the Council's effective strategy for informing households of the changes, dealing with customer enquiries and offering flexibility in payments.

Analysis shows that for those working age households that previously received full Council Tax Benefit, 74% of these households have either paid, or are paying by instalments, the Council Tax due. As at the end of December, 53.8% of the amount due for the year had been received from these households. Recovery action including via the Magistrates Court is being taken against the remaining 26% of these households. 2013/14 Council Tax collection levels are at this stage within the financial planning parameters that underpin the 2013/14 LCTS scheme.

The additional workload associated with dealing with those households impacted by the 2013/14 LCTS scheme has been undertaken and absorbed by the Council's Revenues and Benefits services without any additional staff numbers, in line with the proposed collection strategy.

The risk of reducing collection rates will increase in future years when the Council will have to increase the cut in Council Tax support as it will become increasingly difficult to collect increased Council Tax from some of the most financially vulnerable households in Hartlepool. This position will continue to be monitored carefully.

- 5.2 Members have previously agreed to partly mitigate the 2014/15 LCTS scheme gross funding gap by continuing to apply the additional Council Tax yield generated from the changes to Council Tax exemptions and

reductions. More importantly, as previously reported, the Council is also able to partly mitigate the impact of the cut in Government grant by using the one-off resources earmarked to support the LCTS scheme. However, this funding does not provide a permanent solution to the Government funding cut.

- 5.3 The previous LCTS forecasts have been updated to reflect the proposed Council Tax freeze in 2014/15 and 2015/16 approved at your meeting on 2nd August 2013 and claimant caseload and scheme award costs as at December 2013.
- 5.4 The financial modelling continues to cover two options for the development of the LCTS scheme previously identified which provide a different phasing for increasing the cut in Council Tax Support to address the permanent cut in Government grant for LCTS schemes. The Council is only able to consider these options as a result of previous decisions to earmark one-off funding to temporarily support the LCTS scheme and minimise the impact on low income working age households. Both options are based on the following planning assumptions:
 - The Council resolution on 24th January 2013 to allocate £0.67m of the one-off resources identified from the 2011/12 outturn to support the LCTS scheme over the period 2013/14 to 2015/16 to partly mitigate the impact of cuts in support for working age households and the allocation of £0.52m to manage LCTS financial risks, including the impact of higher LCTS grant cuts over the period of the MTFS;
 - The allocation of the residual Family Poverty Reserve of £0.15m to support the 2014/15 LCTS scheme;
 - The phased use of the additional one-off funding allocated for the LCTS scheme of £0.86m over the period 2014/15 to 2017/18.
- 5.5 Forecasting the annual cost of LCTS is challenging owing to the claimant based nature of the scheme and the range of factors affecting the eligibility of individual households for 'means tested' Council Tax support. These forecasts become more challenging the longer the period covered by the forecasts and need to be considered in the context of annual LCTS scheme support expenditure of £12.25m covering about 15,000 claimant households.
- 5.6 To enable Members to confirm proposals to be referred to full Council for the 2014/15 LCTS scheme and the implications this will have on future year's schemes, detailed financial forecasts for the LCTS scheme have been prepared for the period 2014/15 to 2016/17. These forecasts are based on the following planning assumptions:

Planning assumptions underpinning LCTS forecasts for 2014/15 to 2016/17

- i) The existing caseload remains stable at approximately 15,000 households per year;
- ii) Within the caseload forecast for 2014/15 and future years, provision has been made for a small anticipated increase in pensioners eligible for LCTS;
- iii) Members support the phased use of the one-off 2012/13 and 2013/14 LCTS Reserves to partly mitigate the impact of the Government Grant cut on working age households;
- iv) As approved by Council in January 2013 £0.52m of the 2012/13 LCTS Reserves is retained to manage LCTS financial risks, particularly the impact of higher than forecast anticipated future grant cuts.. The availability of this uncommitted funding would not provide a permanent solution to a higher grant cut, but it would provide a slightly longer lead time for the Council to manage this change and to work with households which would be affected by a higher cut in Council Tax Support.

Regular reviews of these factors will need to be undertaken to assess the implications of changes in these planning assumptions which are inevitable and unavoidable, as the majority of factors are outside the Council's direct control.

- 5.7 In terms of the two options previously identified the key issues are summarised in the following paragraphs:

Option 1 – maintain LCTS cut at 8.5% in 2014/15

- The advantage of this option compared to Option 2 is the ability to maintain the existing level of support to working age households in 2014/15.
- There are a number of disadvantages to this option compared to Option 2:
 - i) The option commits £0.205m of the 2013/14 LCTS reserve and £0.02m of the 12/13 LCTS reserve. This therefore reduces the uncommitted resources available to support future years schemes and manage the risk referred to in the previous paragraphs;
 - ii) Phased reductions in Council Tax support will take place over a shorter period than under option 2, and there will need to be a substantial increase in the level of cut for 2015/16 to 20% from 8.5% in 2014/15;

- iii) Working age households will become used to the level of Council Tax support provided in 2013/14 being maintained in 2014/15 and may not begin to plan for lower levels of support in future years as they may believe the Council will not implement higher cuts after 2014/15;
- iv) It will become increasingly difficult for the Council to demonstrate that the cut in Council Tax support is the result of the Government decision in 2012 to replace the national Council Tax Benefit scheme with a LCTS scheme.

Option 2 – implement a LCTS cut at 12% in 2014/15

- There are a number of advantages of this option compared to Option 1:
 - i) The option does not require any of the LCTS reserve in 2014/15 which means the reserve is available to support future years schemes and manage the risk referred to in the previous paragraphs;
 - ii) Reductions in Council Tax support will be more gradual and phased over a longer period than under option 1;
 - iii) Working age households will become used to the level of Council Tax support provided being gradually reduced and will begin to plan for lower levels of support in future years.
- The disadvantage of this option compared to Option 1 is a reduced level of support to working age households in 2014/15, although Hartlepool households will still receive higher support than households in the other four Tees Valley Authorities, which all implemented 20% cuts in 2013/14 and it is understood will continue these arrangements in 2014/15.

5.8 The following table summarises the financial forecasts for the two options for the period 2013/14 to 2016/17 and highlights the following key issues:

- The increasing impact of the Government grant cut;
- The phased use of the one-off LCTS reserves, which has enabled the Council to reduce the impacts of cuts in government grant.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Option 1					
Cut in Council Tax Support	8.5%	8.5%	20%	20%	
Annual Council Tax increase	0%	0%	0%	2.5%	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Reduction in Government LCTS Grant, net of changes to Council Tax exemptions	1,290	1,540	2,926	3,237	8,993
Less - One -off Transitional Grant	(260)	0	0	0	(260)
Less - One-off Collection Fund Surplus	(140)				(140)
Less - Permanent funding included in MTFS	(70)	(530)	(270)	(270)	(1,140)
Less - Use Family Poverty reserve	(160)	(150)	0	0	(310)
Less - Use 2012/13 LCTS Reserve	(10)	(20)	(640)	0	(670)
Less - Use 2013/14 LCTS Reserve	0	(205)	(502)	(153)	(860)
Less - General Fund Pressure				(1,300)	(1,300)
Total Resources allocated to offset Reduction in LCTS grant cut	(640)	(905)	(1,412)	(1,723)	(4,680)
Cut in Council Tax Support for low income working age households.	650	635	1,514	1,514	4,313

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Option 2					
Cut in Council Tax Support	8.5%	12%	20%	20%	
Assumed Annual Council Tax increase	0%	0%	0%	2.5%	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Reduction in Government LCTS Grant, net of changes to Council Tax exemptions	1,290	1,540	2,926	3,237	8,993
Less - One -off Transitional Grant	(260)	0	0	0	(260)
Less - One-off Collection Fund Surplus	(140)				(140)
Less - Permanent funding included in MTFS	(70)	(488)	(312)	(270)	(1,140)
Less - Use Family Poverty reserve	(160)	(150)	0	0	(310)
Less - Use 2012/13 LCTS Reserve	(10)	0	(660)	0	(670)
Less - Use 2013/14 LCTS Reserve **	0	0	(440)	(153)	(593)
Less - General Fund Pressure				(1,300)	(1,300)
Total Resources allocated to offset Reduction in LCTS grant cut	(640)	(638)	(1,412)	(1,723)	(4,413)
Cut in Council Tax Support for low income working age households.	650	902	1,514	1,514	4,580

** £267,000 of the 2013/14 LCTS Reserve may be available to either delay the forecast 20% reduction in 2015/16 or help alleviate the LCTS General Fund pressure in 2016/17

5.9 Option 2 is the recommended option as it reduces the annual financial risk of managing the LCTS scheme and also provides a slightly longer time for working age households to prepare for reduced levels of Council Tax Support as a result of the Government Grant cuts implemented in 2013/14 and continuing in future years.

5.10 In relation to Parish Councils the national regulations require Billing Authorities (ie. Hartlepool Borough Council) to pass on an element of the Council Tax Support Grant received to individual Parish Councils. For some Local Authorities with a large number of Parish Councils levying

relatively high 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 £4,200 for 2014/15.

6 2014/15 LCTS Scheme Principles

- 6.1 In common with those LCTS schemes established by many other Councils the Hartlepool 2013/14 LCTS scheme is centred around a number of core principles.

A - Every working age household should pay something towards Council Tax

Working age claimants should have their LCTS entitlements recalculated and reduced to ensure an affordable and sustainable scheme.

B - Everyone in the Household should contribute appropriately

Hartlepool would implement the Government's annual increases in the value of non dependant adult deductions from Council Tax Support entitlements.

C - The LCTS scheme should encourage work

Claimants should be allowed to keep more of their earnings before they are taken into account in the LCTS award calculation. The Hartlepool LCTS scheme increased earnings disregards by £5 per week; to £10, £15 and £30 for single person, couple and single parent households respectively.

D - Streamline / Simplify the LCTS Scheme

The Hartlepool LCTS scheme involved the removal of 2nd Adult Rebate, and the restriction of backdating to a maximum of 4 weeks.

E - 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. Hartlepool had historically applied the discretionary top up and this was carried over to the Council's 2013/14 LCTS scheme.

- 6.2 For 2014/15, it is proposed that the existing scheme principles should continue to be applied, as they are clear, fair and were generally supported in the previous consultation on the 2013/14 scheme. Members will retain the opportunity to revisit these scheme principles in developing the 2015/16 LCTS scheme.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The replacement in 2013/14 of the national Council Tax Benefit scheme with Local Council Tax Support schemes determined by individual Councils and a 10% national fund cut transferred a significant new financial risk to Councils. The requirement to protect low income pensioners means the whole of the funding cut falls on low income working income households, which effectively meant the Council was looking at a 20% cut in Council Tax Support for low income working households in 2013/14. As reported previously this change has a greater impact on Councils serving more deprived communities, including Hartlepool. These Councils, including Hartlepool, have also faced disproportionate cuts in core grant funding over the last few years.
- 7.2 The Council had recognised the risk from the Council Tax Benefit scheme abolition before the Government had provided details of the actual changes to be implemented in 2013/14. Accordingly, the Council had set aside one-off resources to manage the impact of this unprecedented transfer of responsibility for an element of Welfare Support from Central Government to Local Government. This approach enabled the Council to limit the cut in Council Tax Support to 8.5% in 2013/14. This position was helped by the late announcement by the Government of one-off funding for Council's limiting the 2013/14 cut to 8.5%, although for Hartlepool this one off grant only covered part of the additional local cost.
- 7.3 Following the Government's decision to mainstream the Local Council Tax Support grant within the main revenue grant allocation from 2014/15 individual Councils now face a difficult choice over the use of the overall grant. This is particularly challenging for Hartlepool as the overall grant will be cut significantly over the next two years as summarised below:

	2014/15 £'000	2014/15 Percentage cut	2015/16 £'000	2015/16 Percentage cut
Actual Grant cut	5,984	9.6%	8,213	14.6%
Forecast Grant cut	5,992	9.6%	8,127	14.4%
Increase/(decrease) in grant cut	(8)		86	
Cumulative Grant cut since 2010/11	£22.365m	28%	£30.578m	39%

- 7.4 In view of impact of the above changes and the level of grant cuts in 2014/15 and 2015/16 Members are requested to consider a 12% LCTS cut for 2014/15 and a forecast 20% reduction in 2015/16.

This approach is designed to phase the reduction in Council Tax Support and in 2015/16 reduces the General Fund budget cuts by £1.4m.

This recommendation is supported by the Corporate Management Team and reflects the advice and recommendations contained in the Medium Term Financial Strategy report on 3rd January 2014.

- 7.5. The Local Government Association at its annual finance conference in early January 2014 warned that nationally Councils will have to cut the money spent on LCTS schemes by as much as £1bn over three years if they pass on overall grant reductions. 2013/14 is the first year of operation of LCTS schemes by local councils and an inter authority analysis of the impacts on Council Tax collection rates of the new arrangements will need to be undertaken early in 2014/15. This data together with other updated Hartlepool scheme financial modelling forecasts will inform the early development of the Council's 2015/16 LCTS scheme.
- 7.6. As reported on 3rd January 2013 the financial year 2015/16 will be the most difficult year the Council has ever faced as budget cuts of **£6.030m** will need to be made in this year, this is after reflecting the £1.4m referred to in the previous sentence. Further cuts of around **£8.8m** will need to be made in 2016/17.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that Members:

- i) Note the report, including the results of the consultation on the proposed 2014/15 Local Council Tax Support Scheme;
- ii) Approve a LCTS cut of 12% for 2014/15 to be referred to Council for approval;
- iii) Note that the 12% cut is designed to phase the reduction in Council Tax Support and in 2015/16 reduces the General Fund Budget cuts by £1.4m;
- iv) Approve the continuation in 2014/15 of the current policy of applying the yield from local Council Tax Exemptions and Reductions Policy to support the LCTS scheme.
- iv) Approve the application of scheme funding from the Family Poverty Reserve, and LCTS Reserves to support the LCTS scheme detailed in Section 5 for Option 2 – the 2014/15 LCTS scheme based on a 12% cut
- v) Approve the continuation in 2014/15 of the principles A to E as set out in section 6.
- vi) To note that in accordance with national regulations approximately £4,200 of the 2014/15 Council Tax Support Grant will be passported to Parish Councils.

9. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To allow Finance and Policy Committee to approve a proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15, to be referred to full Council for approval.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2016/17 reports - Finance and Policy Committee 31st May 2013 and 2nd August 2013.
- 10.2 Local Council Tax Support 2014/15 Reports – Finance and Policy Committee 19th September and 29th November 2013

11. CONTACT OFFICER

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

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

24 January 2014



Report of: Chief Solicitor

Subject: INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

1. TYPE OF DECISION

For information only.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To provide Members with general information upon Individual Electoral Registration, the work already undertaken, funding behind this project and also associated publicity and public awareness to successfully implement these new electoral registration arrangements.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In June, 2011 the Government published a White Paper on Individual Electoral Registration which indicated a commitment to a registration system that would

“reduce electoral fraud by speeding up the implementation of individual voter registration”.

This was further emphasised in a statement released through the then Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform in July, 2013, which stated;

“Confidence in our elections is at the heart of our democracy. In recent years concerns about fraud and a perception that fraud takes place has undermined confidence. The Government is changing electoral registration to deliver a secure and modern way of registering to vote, which will include making online applications available for all”.

It should be noted, that the movement towards individual as opposed to householder registration is supported by all the main political parties and these changes which are to be introduced from 2014 will affect some 46

million electors, 380 local authorities and has a budget of approximately £108 million.

4. ELECTORAL REGISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATION ACT, 2013

4.1 This Electoral Registration and Administration Act, 2013, covers, amongst other matters, the “registration of electors and the administration and conduct of elections”. In summary, the provisions of the Act relating to Individual Electoral Registration are as follows;

- That each elector must apply individually to be registered to vote after the transition to the new system.
- Transitional arrangements to allow data matching to verify entries and provide for a “carry forward” of electors who are not automatically verified or fail to register under the new system in the first year, so that they remain upon the first register published under the new system (likely to be the register used for the 2015 Parliamentary general election).
- Create a legislative framework to allow alternative channels for registration, with online registration being developed.
- Provide for the use of data matching to verify applications, check existing entries in registers and find individuals who do not currently appear on the register.
- Make provision for an annual canvass which is compatible with the new registration system and provide the power to amend or abolish the annual canvass in future, subject to a report by the Electoral Commission and an Order requiring the approval by a resolution of each House of Parliament.
- Ensure that all those wishing to vote by post or proxy will need to be registered under the new registration system to utilise these voting methods after the first annual canvass under the new system.
- Introduce a civil penalty for those who fail to make an application when required to do so by an Electoral Registration Officer.

5. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

5.1 Local authorities are being supported in the transition towards Individual Electoral Registration through the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office. The Autumn, 2013 canvass was delayed in order to ensure that the register was “as complete and accurate as possible” through, for example, data matching between the electoral registers and data held through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The publication date for the register will be 17th February, 2014 for England. From an “IER – North East Region” meeting held at Sunderland City Council on 21st November, 2013, initial work on the revised canvass indicated returns between 48% - 72% Hartlepool’s then figure of 65% mainly through “door to door” canvassing was more than satisfactory when compared with the positions of other local authorities.

- 5.2 From July, 2014 all individuals on the final pre IER register will go through a secure process of data matching against DWP databases to confirm existing electors. The Chief Solicitor in his capacity as Electoral Registration Officer will write to those who are successfully matched to let them know they are formally registered under IER. Furthermore, Electoral Registration Officers will also write to those who are not matched to invite them to supply their personal identifiers (typically National Insurance numbers and date of birth) so that they can be registered individually. As stated within the 2013 Act, every individual who is on the pre IER register who remains resident at their registered address will remain on the register during the transition to IER, including for the 2015 Parliamentary election but would be removed from the register if they have not been confirmed and they have not supplied their personal identifiers from the time the transition is complete. For the avoidance of doubt, current absent voters who are not confirmed or registered individually by 1st December, 2014 would lose their entitlement to an absent vote but would remain on the register in the first instance and be able to vote personally at their polling station. An individual could reapply for an absent vote at any point as long as they register individually. The Government have made it clear their intention to complete the transition in 2015.
- 5.3 In the spring of 2013 the Cabinet Office made grant allocations for the first year of transitional activity (2013-14) and Hartlepool Borough Council were the recipients of £6,269. The Electoral Commission has also formally consulted with Electoral Registration Officers on the revised 'Performance Standards Framework' for the transition to IER. This is in addition, to the Cabinet Office monitoring the performance of the Electoral Registration Officer and electoral staff in preparation for the transition to IER. During July-August, 2013 a "dry run" of the data matching process to test IT systems and processes within each local authority was conducted and Hartlepool Borough Council achieved a 82.47%, which again was more than consistent with the performance of other local authorities in the northern region. The Council has also supplied to the Electoral Commission its draft 'Risk, Implementation Plan and Engagement Strategy'. A copy is appended herewith for Members information (Appendix 1).
- 5.4 As Members will be aware there will be a combined election on 22nd May, 2014 wherein local elections and European Parliamentary elections will take place. The Electoral Commission have indicated they will undertake a public awareness campaign to encourage registration ahead of these elections.
- 5.5 Although dates are to be formally confirmed, during July-August, 2014, it is anticipated that IER "goes live" with new applicants being registered for IER purposes. There will be further data matching for the final pre IER register. Again, the Electoral Commission will undertake a public awareness campaign across England in time to support the 'write out' and other registration activity undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers. By 1st December, 2014 there will be a formal publication of the revised register. Thereafter, April, 2015 will see the registration deadline for voting in the upcoming elections with 7th May, 2015 being prescribed as the date for a

UK Parliamentary general election and the English local elections. The household canvass will then start during the period July-November, 2015 with a Government deadline of August, 2015 for the Government to lay an Order before Parliament that transition can conclude in 2015, otherwise, if no Order is laid, transition will extend to 2016.

- 5.6 It is important to recognise that the 2013 Act sets out new legal powers and duties on Electoral Registration Officers as a result of the move to IER. Although funding for the transition to IER is via the non ring fenced funding arrangements under Section 31 of the Local Government Act, 2003, responsibility will be placed upon Chief Executives to ensure that this funding is committed to enable Electoral Registration Officer to perform their duties. It is noteworthy to mention, that where local authorities believe they have insufficient funding they are entitled to bid for additional funds on a business case basis. The Electoral Registration Officer is proceeding with a bid for additional funding, so that Members are fully aware. In a briefing document provided through the Cabinet Office to Chief Executives it was noted;

“Transition to IER will put significant resource pressure on your electoral services team, so it is crucial that you are receptive to the changes and understand the demands being made of them”.

6. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

- 6.1 Member briefings on the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration will take place in the early part of 2014. Additionally, there will be “public engagement”, through such mechanisms as the formal ‘write out’ and subsequent correspondence from the Electoral Registration Officer, phone calls, e-mails and direct face to face conversations through canvassers together with press releases and general public awareness activity both locally and through the Electoral Commission. There is also a ‘Communications Group’ being established through Sunderland City Council whose Chief Executive Officer also acts as the Regional Returning Officer. Crucially, local authorities need to assess their readiness to successfully implement Individual Electoral Registration and their overall management of electoral registration. The Electoral Commission have indicated that they will “risk sample” authorities, invariably by way of random sampling but also where changes within a local authority highlight a risk, for example, the appointment of a new Returning Officer within an authority is seen as a risk. As an aside, the Tees Valley District Lawyers on 3rd December, 2013 agreed the schedule of fees which should apply to staff engaged in the conduct of an election and reflect those figures that have previously been applied, in recent years.
- 6.2 The Association of Electoral Administrators have indicated that the delivery of IER will be achieved “despite the considerable challenges it will present”. However, particular concerns were raised as to reliance on third parties for infrastructure and data processing, recognising that there was very little

room for any slippage in the current timetable set out through central government. The Association also raises issues of capacity with those local authorities which will deliver local elections together with the European Parliamentary elections in 2014. This is compounded through the delayed canvass into the early part of 2014 when ordinarily Electoral Registration Officers are beginning preparations for elections. There were also concerns raised that although the transition to IER would be adequately funded the longer term picture might not be so sustainable at a time when there has been a significant reduction in local government funding and in Government financial planning for 2015-16. Online registration, when available, will offset some expenditure but there will still be a need to include those groups who are under registered and those individuals who are more transient and therefore less likely to confirm their status through the registration process. There will also be key challenges in integrating electoral registration with other services in seeking to have the most inclusive register, underpinned through national and local public awareness and engagement and also recognising the vital role of Councillors to promote IER locally.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Committee do note this report and the Council's progress towards the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration.
2. That briefings to Members, together with local public awareness campaigns be undertaken through the Electoral Registration Officer and his staff.
3. A further report to be brought back to the Committee in relation to the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration.

8. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of Individual Electoral Registration is a statutory requirement under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act, 2013.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Association of Electoral Administrators – Formal Views on Readiness for the Implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in June 2014.

The Cabinet Office/ The Electoral Commission – Preparing for and Managing the Transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

Electoral Registration and Administration Act, 2013.

10. **CONTACT OFFICER**

Peter Devlin
Chief Solicitor
Email: peter.devlin@hartlepool.gov.uk
Tel: 01429 523003



RISK ASSESSMENT

Defining the level of impact and likelihood of risk

The Risk Assessment Grid

		Impact		
Likelihood		Low (1)	Medium (2)	High (3)
	High (4) (certain)	4	8	12
	High (3) (probable)	3	6	9
	Medium (2) (possible)	2	4	6
	Low (1) (unlikely)	1	2	3

The risk assessment process requires a subjective judgement to be made as to the likelihood of the risks identified in the Risk Management Plan against their potential impact on the service, with a score of 1 to 4 being awarded for likelihood as against a score of 1 to 3 for potential impact. Once the initial judgements are made, the likelihood score should be multiplied by the impact score to provide a **rating** for each risk, so that a contingency action appropriate to the score can be formulated.

IER – Risk Management Plan

No.	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Rating	Contingency / Action	Officer Responsible	Evaluation Date
Forward Planning							
1	Failure to ensure proper plans are in place	2	3	6	Maintain and update project plan to ensure all necessary activities are planned	LB	Ongoing
2	Lack of information on the process involved in the introduction of IER	2	3	6	Awaiting further information on the detailed processes involved in IER. This will not be available until the secondary legislation has been passed and makes it difficult to plan for the introduction of IER.	LB	
IT Hardware, Software, Connectivity and Security							
3	ICT Team are unable to be involved in IER due to other work pressures/change in ICT provider	4	3	12	Contact ICT early in the process to enable them to schedule into their work programme. Maintain regular contact with designated ICT officer.	LB	
4	Technical problems through initial testing	2	3	6	Liaise with ICT to undertake the testing on behalf of the service.	JP	
5	Loss of information during testing of EMS enhancements.	2	3	6	Liaise with CO/Xpress regarding the setting up of a test system. If not able to set up Xpress test system ICT to take a copy of Xpress before enhancements are undertaken. Rigorous testing will be undertaken following the enhancements if any problems arise it will be possible to revert back to the copy of the system.	LB/JP	
Confirmation Dry Run, Analysis of Results and forecasting of 2014 volumes							
6	No ICT support for Dry Run.	2	3	6	ICT made aware of detailed timetable to ensure support is available when required. NB. Issues experienced and resolved through close liaison with ICT/Xpress/CO	LB/JP/TR	8/7/13
7	Upgrade of systems.	2	3	6	System upgrade requirements to be notified to ICT	JP	
8	Loss of information through upgrade of system and testing	2	3	6	Liaise with Xpress to set up a test system. If it is not possible to set up a test system a copy of the system will be taken before any	JP	

7.1
APPENDIX 1

					upgrade is done.		
9	Down time during testing of system after upgrade	2	3	6	If it is not possible to set up a Test System there will be downtime of one day where it will not be possible to use the system. All updates will need to be done in advance of the testing.	JP	
10	UPRNs not up to date.	2	3	6	Continually update EMS with COUs from LLPG – double check LLC/LLPG on weekly basis	JP	
11	Forecasting	2	3	6	Difficult to forecast due to lack of information and guidance.	LB	
12							
Funding							
13	First allocation of funds for 2013/14 lower than anticipated and does not fully reflect local need	3	3	9	Submit Business case to the CO for further funds. N/A – considered enough for current year	LB	2/9/13
14	Funding allocation for 2014/15 lower than anticipated and does not fully reflect local need	3	3	9	Submit business case to the CO for further funds.	LB	
15	Funding allocation received late	2	3	6	Ensure any costs can be paid using a different cost code until the funds from the CO are received – separate budget code identified for all IER expenditure	LB	
16	Funding allocation not all allocated for use by IER by the Council as the funding is not 'ring fenced'	1	1	1	Provide an estimate of the additional costs that will be incurred with the introduction of IER to support the need for all funds to be allocated in the budget to IER.	LB	
17	No funding of IER process from 2015/16 onwards	4	3	12	Include in Medium Term Financial Plan to cover costs of IER from 2015/16 onwards.	LB	
18	ICT request some of the funding for the ICT work.	3	3	9	Any requests for funding for ICT work will need to be submitted to budget manager for consideration along with all IER costs.	LB	
Resources – Capacity and Capability							
19	Difficulty in appointing additional canvassers	4	3	12	Canvassers may be unwilling to work on the canvass over the winter months. Canvassers will need to be contacted early in the process regarding their availability	JP	

					and willingness to work. Recruitment could then commence for any vacant canvass areas.		
20	Training of staff	2	2	4	Need further information on the process involved to know what training is required for staff.	JP	
21	Limited resources available	4	3	12	Business case to be made for additional physical resource from within the council and additional funding from CO	LB	
Management and Reporting							
22	Lack of information to include in Project Plan	3	3	9	Project plan to be based on the preparation plan produced by the CO. When further information guidance is available the plan will be updated to reflect this.	LB	
23	Lack of guidance from EC and CO	3	3	9	Guidance from the EC and CO will be provided throughout the process. This will impact on the Project Plan and will require the Project Plan and risk register to be updated throughout the process.	LB	

IER Engagement Strategy

Date:	Oct-13
Author:	Lorraine Bennison
Document version:	1

Reviews:			
Name	Role	Date	Sign-off (✓)

Overview of challenges in area

Historically, Hartlepool achieves in excess of 95% response for the annual canvass, with rates varying across Wards. Despite extra resource a

Approach to meeting these challenges

Increased target approach to low responding Wards, to try and maximise responses and accuracy of register. Despite not being successful in bid for additional funding to engage with private and social landlords, try through available limited resources to engage and obtain access to tenant information. Work with Child & Adult Department and local education establishments to increase awareness, engagement and registration for eligible students.

Approach to evaluating activity

Canvass out-turn will evidence successfulness of tagged canvass activity. Engagement with Landlords will be robustly monitored and recorded (subject to available resource), this will also be applied to student/attainer engagement.

This template has been designed to assist you in identifying who you need to target and how you are going to target them. It should be read in conjunction with Part 1: Preparing for Individual Electoral Registration.

The tabs are populated with examples - but the content you include will be more extensive, particularly for your priority areas.

Using this template

The first part of this template covers using data to identify the challenges in your areas.

1) In tab 1 you should set out the data sources you are using to understand local challenges. (Step 1:

Building a profile of your registration area)

2) In tab 2 you should record the data from the dry-run, and cross reference this with what you know from the other data sources. This should give you an indication of local priorities and target audiences. (Step 1:

Building a profile of your registration area)

3) Use tab 3 to list these priorities. (Step 2: Identifying the audience for public engagement)

4) In tab 4, identify the direct contact tactics you will use and which of the audiences and priorities these address. (Step 3: Understanding channels for engaging residents)

5) In tab 5, identify the partners you will use and which of the audiences and priorities these will help you reach

6) In tab 6, identify the media and advertising you will use and which of the audiences and priorities these address

Once these tabs have been completed you should be able to complete the overview of your strategy on the first

Details of how you will implement this strategy should be set out in your implementation plan.

Building a profile of your registration area - Local and national data sources

Use this section to list local and national data sets that you can access to assist you to build a profile of the demographics of your registration area and how you will use this data to inform your engagement strategy. Some examples of relevant data/information are set out below.

Source of Data/Information	Information provided	How this data will be used
Confirmation dry run	Match rate by ward including number and location of green, amber and red matches	To review the match rate across all areas. Identify any geographical concentrations of red matches to inform demographic analysis of authority area
Census 2011	Demographic information about population profile of a ward on the number and geographical distribution of unconfirmed and underregistered groups including: young adults 20-29, private rented accommodation, BME population, first languages spoken, student population	Identify number and location of hard to reach groups to identify reasons for low match rates, identify any geographical concentrations of certain types of unconfirmed and/or underregistered groups to inform public awareness strategy e.g. translated materials required, particular community groups to be engaged
Local authority education data	Number of attainers within registration area	To establish the number of young people who will need to be reached
Council tax data	Number and location of properties exempt from council tax due to all occupants being students or properties being second homes to identify number and location of properties	Identify concentrations of student properties and second homes and generate specific names
Local authority information about access to the internet/use of social media/unique visits to local authority website	Number of households without access to the internet, number of unique users visiting local authority website each month	To establish how many people are likely to be reached via digital channels, to identify areas with low internet use where other channels may be more effective
Hartlepool Regeneration & Neighbourhoods-Ward Profiles	Provides a Ward overview, including demographic, community facilities, key groups & facts, range of statistics illustrating levels of poverty. As well as a summary, the information is illustrated under key themes which reflect Council structure and its priorities.	Assist in identifying the statistics for the hard to reach groups, whilst providing reasons for potential non-engagement with the council. Neighbourhood Management relationships to be utilised to make contact with the community groups within each Ward.
Hartlepool Adult data	Number of elderly people within registration area including those in	Local data matching following CDR and CLR to improve accuracy of register and IER status
Hartlepool Resourcelink Information	Payroll information for Hartlepool staff	As the main employer in the town and a significant number of employees living in the town, this data will be used as part of local data matching
Hartlepool Election Staff Data	Database of election staff used for canvass, elections etc.	Local data matching following CDR and CLR to improve accuracy of register and IER status

Building a profile of your registration area - local public awareness priorities and issues

Using the information obtained from your data analysis, use this section to set out the key groups you will need to communicate with in your local area and the key stakeholders who will help you to target these groups. The table below provides some examples of the types of challenges that EROs may encounter

Local priorities - geographical and target groups	Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Notes on action points
Attainers	High	Undertake data matching exercise following canvass and contact identified unregistered attainers
Hart Ward (and to a lesser extent Seaton & Foggy F	High	
Large rented sector in certain wards/across the local authority	High	Develop targeted approach, through work with landlords direct. This applies to private and social landlords and will involve face to face meetings to establish a rapport with the organisations to ensure relationships can be maintained.
Burn Valley, De Bruce Foggy Furze, Headland & Harbour, Manor House, Victoria Wards and Polling District JD of Seaton Ward.	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced targetting procedures to be implemented for both canvass and IER live, by providing canvassers with additional information including ward profiles, to improve response rate. - Consideration to be given to additional payments for improved response rates in hard to reach areas. IER funding will determine the level of this. - Secondary checks to be made using as many available datasets as possible, building on the success of local data matching following CDR. - Home visits by electoral team as required.
Number of wards with residents whose first language is not English	Medium	Need to ensure alternative languages are readily available, and translation service contact details checked and updated.
Low levels of internet across the Borough	Medium	Need to ensure paper forms are responded to and promote use of community internet facilities, where appropriate
Residential/Care/Nursing/Hospitals/Hostels	Medium	Expand on the current regular mini canvass checks (with nursing homes) to include all other multiple occupancy dwellings.
Community Groups identified in Ward Profiles	Medium	Obtain appropriate contact information and determine with Group best approach - presentation to group meeting/noticeboard information
All residents of the Borough	Medium	Utilise engagement links with Hartlepool Radio, building on live Radio interviews held for elections and canvass previously.
Citizenship Ceremonies	Low	Continue with the current procedure of Electoral Staff attending ceremonies and being the first contact for the new British Citizens.

Channels: Direct Contact

Use this section to list the ways that you can contact residents directly. This should include incoming contact (e.g. when residents contact the ERO or the local authority directly when accessing other services) and outgoing contact. The template contains some examples of the types of direct contact and how messages about IER may be disseminated through these channels.

Channel	Communication opportunity	Incoming or Outgoing	Activity	Priority addressed / audience reached	Evaluation measures
Direct mail	IER write out	Outgoing from ERO	To communicate confirmation/registration status to individual elector and encourage them to take action where they need to. HEF will seek information about other potential electors.	Confirmed and unconfirmed, some unregistered	Response rates
	Council tax	Outgoing from service area	Reminder included in council tax letter, subject to IER funding level	Confirmed and unconfirmed	Number sent out/response rates
Face to face	Elections office	Incoming from visitors to elections office / outgoing, home visits where	Brief staff using EC briefing document. Ensure capacity at peak times, not only on electoral work but other duties, co-ordinate leave arrangement to take into account potential peak times but also to ensure that the section is not under-	General audience, those finding registration challenging, including disabled & elderly residents	Number and nature of enquiries
	Other services: Hartlepool Connect (including Registrars Service) & all Council access points (limited)	Incoming to use other services	Briefing for frontline staff (poster/leaflet also displayed) Support to assist residents to complete forms/online. Consideration to be given to HotDesk for assistance at peak times.	Unconfirmed	Number of services engaged Conversations with services to assess uptake interest <i>Feedback forms</i>
	Middleton Grange Shopping Centre	Incoming to receive additional support	Support to assist residents to complete forms/online registration through Stall in main shopping centre	General audience, potentially under-registered groups ie attainners who visit the shopping centre in lunch break	Number of residents supported
Telephone	Elections office- Hotline	Incoming- IER query/service request	Brief staff answering calls using EC briefing document. Ensure capacity at peak times (write-out, general election advertising, transition end)	General audience, those finding registration challenging	Number and nature of enquiries
	Hartlepool Connect (main switchboard)	Incoming - Other query/service request	Calls transferred to Elections Office but if no-one available, staff to be briefed re answering calls using EC briefing document. Notify Hartlepool Connect of potential peak times (write-out, general election advertising, transition end) to factor into their rostering arrangements. Ask caller if they have received information about IER and record nature of enquiry to support evaluation. Emphasise	General audience, those finding registration challenging	Number and nature of enquiries
Emails	General email to staff / all electoral outgoing emails	Outgoing	General messages about IER and where to find out more for staff who are local authority residents, include a note about those who do not live in Hartlepool, that this is national.	All HBC Staff (high percentage live & work in Hartlepool) and every property in Borough.	Number of residents reached & message sent to a wider
Newsletter / magazine	See Activity	Outgoing	Newsline - the Council's internal staff newsletter, will be able to include items on a regular basis. Hartbeat - Council magazine, potential for inclusion in more than one edition, subject to IER funding.General messages about IER and	General audience	All households/busines sses reached
Social Media queries	Local Authority Facebook/Twitter	Outgoing corporate Incoming enquiries	Ensure queries about IER are answered within specified period - passing queries from individuals for resolution by Elections office. Track any patterns in queries. Direct users to online registration. Work with Public Relations team to ensure all channels are used.	General audience, young people	Number and nature of enquiries
Via elected representatives (Councillor/MP/Parish Councillors)	Face to face, email, letter	Incoming enquiry to elected representatives	Send relative information to Councillors/MP/Parish Councillors including information about where to direct residents for further information and contact details for elections office to deal with specific query.	General audience	Feedback from Elected representatives
Radio	Radio Hartlepool - Breakfast Programme	Outgoing	Use the ongoing relationship with the Breakfast presenters to get the message across in a light hearted way, aimed at our local residents. This has worked with election and canvass, generating a number of enquiries.	General audience	Number and nature of enquiries

Channels: Local partners

Use this section to list local partners who may be able to assist you to communicate messages about IER to specific groups, both general and targeted messages. This list should include all partners, including public sector organisations, community/faith groups, major employers etc, the groups they can reach, their contact details and how you will communicate with them. Some examples are provided below.

Organisation	Local Authority Contact/Information obtained from	Details	Activity	Audience reached	Evaluation opportunities
Hartlepool Borough Council	Electoral Team	Locate helpdesk at main entrance to Hartlepool Connect, staffed by elections team	One-stop shop for information and registering	General audience, visiting Civic Centre	Number of residents reached
Health related organisations including local hospital Trust	Public Health Team	Local hospital, doctors surgeries, Walk-in centres, health clinics	Briefing for NHS officers to send to relevant individual service providers. List of locations to send posters to (all over Borough)	General audience including hard to reach groups. Consider it important to cover all town, not just priority areas as IER is completely new and people who are matched Green will still want to know what it is about.	Number of providers engaged x number of residents using these providers
Hartlepool Business Forum	Economic Development	Email to all businesses in town followed up by posters for display.	Check accuracy of current database used for Civic events	All residents employed by Hartlepool companies	Number of partners engaged x number of residents using these partners
Employers	Contact directly	Housing Hartlepool/Asda/Morrisons/Tesco/Heerema - main employers in the town	Ask them to display posters in staff areas and include in staff newsletter/email. Offer opportunity for electoral team to attend and set up stand in rest room.	General audience including hard to reach groups. Consider it important to cover all town, not just priority areas as IER is completely new and people who are matched Green will still want to know what it is about.	Number of employees reached
Charities	Contact directly	Contact: Pansies, Epilepsy Outlook, Blind Association, Skillshare etc	Ask to promote directly to members.give internet access in order to register, put links on their websites	18-24s, disengage, NEETs, Learning disabilities, general audience	Number of partners engaged x number of residents using these partners
Community groups	Contact directly	Contact: As per Ward profiles and work with Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency	Electoral team to attend meetings as require. Provide key information in an understandable format.	General audience	Number of partners engaged x number of residents using these partners.
Parish Councils	Contact directly	5 Parish Councils - will assist with hard to reach groups and any rural issues	Promote IER within their Parish area	Parished areas	Number of residents reached
Private Landlords	Contact directly via Housing Team	Various	Face to face meetings to be organised to develop a process/relationship for capturing movers etc.	Renters, students (new to area due to new university course), frequent movers	Number of partners engaged x number of residents using these partners
Social housing providers	Contact directly	Social Housing Providers inc. Housing Hartlepool	Registration form/leaflet to be issued with every tenancy	BMEs, disengaged, frequent movers	Number of partners engaged x number of residents using these partners
FE providers	Education department	All schools and colleges	Display posters and issue leaflets to students. Potential for stall at college events.	Attainers	Number of partners engaged x number of residents using these partners
NEET liaison	Employment and skills team	NEET Liaison / Skillshare	Raise registration during conversations with individuals	NEETs	Number of residents reached
Social care visits	Social care	Social care	Raise registration during conversations with individuals	Disengaged, disabled, over-75s	Number of residents reached

Channels: Media and Advertising

Use this section to list the media and advertising channels available to you to promote messages about Individual Electoral Registration and who and how many people these channels reach. Some examples are provided below

Digital Channels	Activity	Audience reached and priorities met	Evaluation opportunities
Hartlepool Borough Council website	Put links and banner advert on our website, provide comprehensive information, place links on areas of site visited by target groups and portals where users submit address changes	General audience, service users, homemovers	Hits on banner adverts measured via WebMeasure, visits to pages tracked
Social Media	Tweet around key activities - write-out, registration deadline, PR activity. Post on Facebook page and share online advertisements run by EC	General audience, service users	Number of followers, Likes, Shares, number of direct queries answered
PR/Media			
Press Releases to Hartlepool Mail	Around key activities - write-out, registration deadline, PR activity. Post on website Facebook page and share online advertisements run by EC	Confirmed, Unconfirmed	List publications and circulation
Publicity events	Potential to run stall in main shopping Centre	General audience	Measure interest
Radio Hartlepool	See Channel - Direct Contact. Use the Breakfast programme for regular updates. Also, depending on IER funding, consider taking advertisement package.	General local audience, including attainers and students	Listening Figures
Residents Groups newsletters	Submit articles to Community Groups as listed in Ward profiles for inclusion in Newsletters. Information can be tailored to include specific statistics for areas.	General audience	Circulation
Elected Member - Ward Newsletters	Liaison with elected members to include article and details of IER in newsletter. Specific statistics for Ward can be included.	Some Wards - not all Members do a newsletter	Circulation
Free advertising channels			
Outdoor poster sites	All Community Centres, libraries and polling stations	General audience	Reach
Website	Banner	General Audience	Hits on banner adverts measured via WebMeasure, visits to pages
Paid advertising channels			
Radio Hartlepool	12 Week advertising campaign, subject to IER Funding.	General audience, including attainers and students	Listening Figures
Council Magazine	Advert in Hartbeat (subject to IER Funding) to complement article.	General messages about IER and where to find out more. To co-ordinate with the write-out and based on template EC text. Later reminder in edition in run-up to UK General Election, with reminders ahead of this if shown necessary by registration data	Number of residents reached