

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

31 January 2014

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

Present:

Councillor: Christopher Akers-Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob Cook, Keith Dawkins, Ray Martin-Wells, Robbie Payne,
Carl Richardson and Chris Simmons

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

Also in attendance:

Edwin Jeffries, HJTUC

Officers:

Dave Stubbs, Chief Executive
Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive
Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Louise Wallace, Director of Public Health
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Graham Frankland, Assistant Director, Resources
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Carole Johnson, Head of Health Improvement
Dale Clark, Estates and Asset Manager
Lorraine Bennison, Principal Registration and Members' Services Officer
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services Officer

187. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alison Lilley, Peter Jackson, Marjorie James and Paul Thompson.

188. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting – see minutes 199 and 201.

189. Minutes

None.

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

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

- (i) To update the MTFS to reflect the impact of the 2014/15 Local Government Finance Settlement and local decisions reached by Members over the past few months; and
- (ii) To enable Members to finalise the detailed 2014/15 budget proposals and recommendations to be referred to Council on 6 February 2014.

The report was prepared before the Government confirmed the 2014/15 Local Government Finance Settlement which was subject to consultation over the period 19 December 2013 to 15 January 2014. It was not anticipated that there will be any significant change in the provisional grant announced by the Government in December 2013.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided a detailed and comprehensive background to the preparation of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2014/15. Outlined in the report were the one off resources available to the Council from the 2013/14 outturn, a review of reserves and changes to the Core Revenue Grant and linkages to the impact of schools converting to academies. Previous MTFS had recommended allocating these resources to continue the multi-year strategy to manage the financial challenges faced by the Council. The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2014/15 and 2015/16 was outlined and confirmed that public sector cuts would continue and Councils will continue to face significant funding cuts. It was highlighted that the North East Councils, including Hartlepool, will again face higher cuts in Spending Power and Core Revenue Grant than the national average.

The impact of the 2014/15 and 2015/16 Grant cuts on the General Fund budgetary position was highlighted and a supplementary report had been provided that included the proposal from the Children's Services Committee not to implement the Discretionary Transport saving in 2014/15 but to phase this saving in over 5 years commencing 2015/16. The report also highlighted the impact of cuts in Early Intervention Grant funding of 25%.

It was noted that Members had previously indicated they wished to freeze Council Tax for 2014/15 and the report outlined Government's reassurance that the extra funding for freezing Council Tax would remain available.

In conclusion, the Chief Finance Officer highlighted the following:

- The December 2013 settlement announcement covered 2 years;
- For Hartlepool it was confirmed that a cut of nearly £6m in 2014/15 (9.6%) would be imposed and £8.2m in 2015/16 (14.6%);
- By 2015/16 the cumulative grant cut since 2010/11 was £30.6m (39%);
- It was confirmed that the grant cuts continued to have a disproportionate impact on Councils that were more dependent on Government grants and serving more deprived communities;
- It was confirmed that the budget strategy for 2014/15 enabled the Council to set a balanced budget and was designed to provide a longer lead time to implement more difficult budget cuts over the next two years;
- It was emphasised that 2015/16 would be the most difficult budget the Council had faced;
- It was confirmed that the continuation of a multi-year approach to managing the various financial challenges facing the Council was still appropriate and provided the most effective way of managing these issues in the current financial climate.

The Chair of the Children's Services Committee added that the Committee had detailed discussions on discretionary school transport and had recommended an option that would provide one year grace for the Local Authority and schools to identify an alternative solution. Whilst the Committee recognised it was regrettable to impose any cuts to discretionary school transport, it was noted that the proposal had the agreement of all the schools involved.

The Chair applauded the detailed work that had been undertaken to produce the MTFS for 2014/15 and noted that the multi-year approach safeguarded the future for Hartlepool.

Decision

- 1) In the event of any minor change in the final grant for 2014/15 was recommended this is addressed by increasing, or decreasing the use of one-off resources.

2013/14 Outturn Issues, including Review of Reserves (details in section 4 and 5)

- 2) The allocation of the available one-off funding of £2.640m (which included £0.680m from the 2012/13 Uncommitted Outturn, £0.860m Uncommitted Equal Pay Provision and £1.1m from the 2013/14 forecast General Fund Outturn) was approved to support the following issues, which for completeness included £0.2m to support the Highways Maintenance Programme which was approved by Council on 25th July 2013:

Items approved by Finance and Policy Committee 31.01.14 and referred to Council 06.02.14	
- Business Rates risks	£0.900m
- Support of Local Council Tax Support scheme	£0.860m
- Support of MTFS 2014/15 to 2016/17	£0.680m
Item approved by Council 25.07.13	
- Support for Highways Maintenance Programme	£0.200m
	£2.640m

- 3) The forecast General Fund Outturn and one-off commitments detailed in Appendix C, which included £0.729m to support the 2014/15 to 2016/17 MTFS were approved;
- 4) It was noted that the higher forecast General Fund Outturn detailed in Appendix C could not be relied upon when setting the 2014/15 budget and if this higher outturn was achieved a strategy for using the uncommitted outturn would be developed as part of the 2015/16 budget proposals for approval by Members.
- 5) The allocation of the one-off surplus of £130,000 achieved on the Future Jobs Fund scheme as detailed in paragraph 4.9 to support the current level of demand for Business Grants in 2014/15 and 2015/16 was approved.
- 6) The allocation of the one-off funding arising from Core Revenue grant changes lined to the Education Services Grant of £2.720m to support Regeneration Priorities £0.4m (as detailed in recommendation 20.41) and the core revenue budget £2.320m as follows was approved:

- 2014/15 - £0.32m

- 2015/16 - £1.0m
- 2016/17 - £1.0m

- 7) It was noted that the forecast one-off funding of £2.720m would be received in 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- 8) It was noted that the above decisions underpin the financial strategy recommended and were reflected in the budget deficits details in this report. These resources will be held in a '2014/15 to 2015/16 MTFS Budget Support Fund Reserve'. For completeness the table included one-off resources approved in the 2013/14 MTFS to show the total value of one-off funding being used over the next three years to support the revenue budget:

Summary of contributions to 2014/15 to 2016/17 MTFS Budget Support Fund

	£'000
Items recommended as part 2014/15 MTFS	
(a) 2012/13 Uncommitted outturn – paragraph 20.4	680
(b) 2013/14 Forecast Outturn – paragraph 20.5	729
(b) Core Revenue Grant changes linked to ESG – paragraph 20.8	2,320
Previously approved as part 2013/14 MTFS	
(a) Delayed Collaboration savings reserve	133
(b) 2013/14 Budget Support Fund	200
	4,062

Summary of planned use of 2014/15 to 2015/16 MTFS Budget Support Fund

	£'000
Support of 2014/15 Budget	671
Support of 2015/16 Budget	1,743
Support of 2016/17 Budget	1,648
Total budget support 2014/15 to 2016/17	4,062

Funding for Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme and Local Welfare Support (details in section 7.8 and 7.24 respectively)

- 9) It was noted that the Government's decision that from 2014/15 the specific grant to support for Local Council Tax Support schemes would be included in the Core Revenue Grant. This change required individual Council's to determine how the Core Revenue Grant was

allocated between support for the LCTS scheme and General Fund Services.

- 10) As a result of this change it was approved that for 2014/15 the amount of grant allocated towards the MTFS was maintained at the same level as 2013/14, which underpinned the recommended 2014/15 LCTS scheme to be referred to Council on 30th January 2014.
- 11) For 2015/16 it was approved that the 2015/16 grant cut was shared across the General Fund budget and the LCTS scheme, which would reduce the 2015/16 General Fund budget cuts by approximately £1.4m.
- 12) The Government's decision to withdraw the Local Welfare Support funding from 2015/16 was noted.
- 13) The allocation of the available Local Welfare Support funding of £0.78m (i.e. forecast 2013/14 uncommitted outturn of £0.145m and 2014/15 grant allocation of £0.635m) to provide the following annual allocations over the period of the MTFS was approved. It was noted that this strategy did not provide a permanent funding solution and the position for 2017/18 will need to be reviewed when the MTFS was rolled forward to include this year.

	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	Total £'000
Staffing resources *	80	80	80	240
Grants/support to individuals	180	180	180	540
	260	260	260	780

General Fund Revenue Budget 2014/15 to 2016/17 (details in section 8)

2014/15 Issues

- 14) The actual grant cut for 2014/15 of **£5.984m**, which is a reduction of **9.4%** was noted.
- 15) The budget pressures detailed in Appendix E were approved.
- 16) The following package of measures to fund the 2014/15 gross budget deficit of £9.117m were approved:

	£'000
Gross Budget deficit 2014/15	9,117
Changes in Planning assumption (paragraph 8.3)	(1,797)
Public Health Funding	(500)
Full Year ICT saving (includes potential rental income)	(500)
Sub Total	6,320
Additional changes in Planning Assumptions (paragraph 8.10)	(1,273)
Planned savings	(4,251)
Sub Total	796
Use of one-off funding	(796)
Net budget deficit 2014/15	0

- 17) It was noted that the use of one-off funding of £0.796m deferred part of the budget deficit to 2015/16, which provided a longer lead time and was reflected in the 2015/16 forecast deficit.
- 18) It was confirmed that having reconsidered on 19th December 2013 the issues referred from the Extraordinary Council on 19th November 2013 that the following recommendations were included in the Budget proposals to be submitted to Council on 6th February 2014:
- i) Option 3 was approved and any unallocated Ward Member budget funds be carried forward and put in a reserve to continue Ward Member budgets for future years.

It was noted that based on the forecast Ward Member budget outturn for 2013/14 it was anticipated that £100,000 would be uncommitted and carried forward to 2014/15, although the final outturn would depend on the value of schemes approved before the year end.

- ii) That in response to the recommendation of Council at their Extraordinary meeting on 19th November 2013, a proportion of unspent Ward Member budget 2013/14 funds should not be allocated to support Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency (HVDA) for the provision of Capacity and Resource Building in the VCS from 2014/15. Individual Ward Councillors had already made commitments to allocate £14,500 to HVDA and should other Councillors wish to do the same that was for them to decide individually as agreed at the Extraordinary meeting of Council.
- iii) That Ward Member funding be reduced in 2014/15 to fund the Environmental Apprenticeship Scheme of £34,000, as recommended by the Regeneration Services Committee on 26th September 2013.

This proposal commits £34,000 from the 2013/14 overall

Corporate outturn as detailed in Appendix C and is reflected in recommendation (v) below.

- iv) That Finance and Policy Committee having reconsidered the Community Pool Funding Programme allocation for 2014/15, as previously determined by Finance and Policy Committee on 18 October 2013, in line with the proposal agreed by Council at their extraordinary meeting on 19th November, indicates that no variation to that decision be made.
 - v) That the 2014/15 total Ward Member budget be set at £132,000 and funded from the overall corporate outturn as detailed in Appendix C. This will provide a budget of £4,000 for each Member, which is a reduction of 20% on the 2013/14 budget of £165,000.
- 19) The proposal to earmark the temporary employers' pension contribution saving in 2014/15 in relation to the Chief Executive's post of £30,000 to increase the number of apprenticeships by 2 and to allocate these places to young people who have chosen to stay in care or care leavers was approved.
- 20) It was noted that in line with the Government funding conditions for the Better Care Fund the detailed strategy for using these resources would be approved by the Health and Well Being Board and details would be reported to a future meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee and it was noted that the 2014/15 'Better Care Fund' included £1.794m of existing grant which was used to fund continuing Adult Social care expenditure commitments. At this stage it was unclear what commitments need to be funded from the additional 2014/15 grant of £0.503m. For planning purposes, it was not anticipated that this would benefit the General Fund budget in 2014/15. However, there may be some limited scope to enable existing Adult Care services that contribute to the Better Care Fund priorities to be funded from this grant subject to the detailed grant conditions and details would be reported to a future Finance and Policy Committee.

Council Tax 2014/15 and 2015/16 (details in section 10)

- 21) A Council Tax freeze for 2014/15 was approved.
- 22) It was noted that on 15th January 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government wrote to Councils stating - "Ministers have agreed that the funding for 2014/15 (including 2015/16) freeze grant should be built into the spending review baseline. This gives as much certainty as possible at this stage that the extra funding for freezing Council Tax will remain available".
- 23) An indicative Council Tax freeze for 2015/16 was approved, and it was

noted that the final decision would be made in February 2015 and the Government would bring forward proposals for a 2014/15 Council Tax freeze scheme in due course.

- 24) The production of an explanatory Council Tax leaflet for 2014/15 to provide information on the Councils' financial position was approved and it was noted that the cost of approximately £1,800 could be funded from existing budgets.

2015/16 and 2016/17 Issues (details in section 11)

- 25) The actual Core Revenue grant cuts for 2015/16 of **£8.213m**, which is a reduction of **14.6%** and anticipated further cuts in 2016/17 was noted.
- 26) It was noted that after reflecting the strategy detailed in this report the Council will need to make cuts of **£6.252m in 2015/16** and forecast cuts in **2016/17 of £8.655m**.

Early Intervention Grant (EIG) (details in section 13)

- 27) The proposed savings detailed in Appendix K which were required to address the Government EIG grant cut of £1.512m - a 25% cut were approved.

Public Health (details in section 14)

- 28) The allocation of the forecast 2013/14 Public Health saving of £0.5m as an earmarked reserve to manage in-year Public Health risks in the first year of operating these services was approved. In the event these monies were not needed in 2013/14 it was approved that they were set aside to manage ongoing financial risk in this area.
- 29) It was noted that the use of Public Health funding of £0.5m in 2014/15 and future years to fund eligible General Fund expenditure was only sustainable whilst the existing grant continues and there was a potential risk that this grant was reduced in future years.

Capital Programme 2014/15 (details in section 15)

The following recommendations would be implemented once approved by Council on 6th February 2014 unless otherwise stated as requiring a further report.

- 30) The detailed ring fenced Government Capital allocations for 2014/15, as detailed in the following table were noted and delegated authority was given to the relevant Policy Committee to approve detailed proposals for using these ring fenced funds.

2013/14 Capital Grant £'000		2014/15 Capital Grant £'000
1,351	Local Transport Plan	1,556
269	Adult Social Services	275
1,144	Schools Capital Programme*	950

* estimate pending notification of actual allocation.

- 31) The proposals for using the 2014/15 Council Capital Fund of £1.0m (funded from £0.6m of Prudential Borrowing and £0.4m of one-off resources) as detailed in Appendix L were approved to fund:
- Regeneration schemes of £0.45m with delegated authority to the Finance and Policy Committee to approve detailed proposals for using these resources; and
 - Property Schemes of £0.55m with delegated authority to the Finance and Policy Committee to approve virement between individual schemes if necessary once final costings were known.
- 32) It was noted that £0.185m of 2013/14 Council Capital Fund allocated for potential works to the Indoor Bowls Club would be carried forward as uncommitted at the year end. Any decision on the use of these resources would be subject to a separate report to the Finance and Policy Committee and subsequent referral to full Council for approval. These resources would be held as uncommitted until the detailed master planning for the Mill House site had been completed.
- 33) The inclusion of £2.095m with the 2013/14 Prudential Borrowing to temporary fund previously approved capital expenditure on HMR pending the completion of land sales in 2014/15 and the receipt of capital income was noted.
- 34) The Street Lamp Replacement scheme at a capital cost of £4.98m was approved and will be funded from Prudential Borrowing and from 2015/16 achieve a minimum General Fund budget saving of £40,000 (net of annual loan repayment costs). It was noted that the major financial risk related to the equipment costs which made up 75% (£3.6m) of the overall scheme cost. This risk would be managed through the procurement process and if this cost exceeded £3.6m plus 5% a further report would be submitted before the scheme progresses.
- 35) The provision of car parking facilities at Macaulay Road at a capital cost of £0.145m to be funded from forecast capital receipts was approved.
- 36) The proposal to develop a detailed business case to extend the Social

Housing development project, which it is envisaged will provide an additional 35 to 40 properties was approved. The detailed business case would be submitted to a future Finance and Policy Committee and then referred to Council. The business case would outline a strategy to achieve value for money from the available Prudential Borrowing through the appropriate mix of buying and refurbishing run down properties, or the purchase of 'ready to let' properties not requiring renovation. The business case would also be linked into wider regeneration objectives, including the Housing Market Renewal project where this was appropriate.

37) The proposal to build an Independent Living Centre at Burbank Street was approved and it was noted that a detailed business case on the recommended option for achieving this development would be reported to a future Finance and Policy Committee and Council for final approval.

38) The capital budget for the replacement of the following Operational Equipment was approved:

- Vehicles Replacement Programme – 2014/15 capital expenditure £1,115,000
- Replacement of Wheelie Bins – 2014/15 capital expenditure of £60,000

Robustness of Budget forecasts (details in section 16)

39) The detailed advice provided by the Chief Finance Officer in section 16 was approved, including the following specific recommendations underpinning this advice.

40) The strategy for managing capital receipts risks, including the Jacksons Landing project, detailed in paragraph 16.3 (iii) and the earmarking of the following resources to manage this risk were approved:

- Right to Buy income of £191,000;
- One-off Government Grant refund in relation to the New Homes Bonus adjustment £211,000;
- Uncommitted 'Major Regeneration Reserve' of £100,000; and
- Unused Prudential borrowing approval (repayment costs covered within the existing revenue budget) for 'Major Regeneration Projects' of £393,000.

41) It was approved that the earmarking of the above resources be reviewed on a regular basis to determine if/when these resources can be un-earmarked and made available for other priorities determined by

Members. It was recommended that the trigger points for this review would be progressed in achieving the capital receipts target and progress on the Jacksons Landing project.

191. Reviewing the Sustainable Community Strategy for Hartlepool *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

To present the Committee with the final draft of the new Sustainable Community Strategy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the preparation of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for the Borough. It was noted that consultation on the first and second draft had been undertaken and the final draft was presented to Members for consideration.

It was noted that the final draft of the Strategy would be submitted to Full Council for approval.

Decision

- 1) The final draft Sustainable Community Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 was approved.
- 2) That the Strategy be submitted to Council for final agreement.

192. Safer Hartlepool Partnership's Draft Community Safety Plan 2014-17 *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference RN 24/13.

Purpose of report

To present and seek comments from the Finance and Policy Committee on the first draft of the Community Safety Plan 2014-17 (formerly known as the

Community Safety Strategy).

Issue(s) for consideration

The report and Community Safety Plan outlined the priorities of the Safer Hartlepool Plan. The Executive Summary which was attached at Appendix 1 included the analysis of a wide range of local crime, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and offending data combined with the results of community consultation, including the Council's Household Survey and Safer Hartlepool Partnership "Face the Public" event. The strategic objectives for 2014/17 and the Annual Priorities for 2014/15 were outlined in the report.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods informed Members that there had been a marked increase in anti-social behaviour across the Tees Valley area and the Tees Valley local authorities were working with the Police and Crime Commissioner and lobbying for funding to deal with this within the Tees Valley area. It was highlighted that public perception on a ward by ward basis was provided in the Plan which provided feedback from the communities' perspective.

A Member welcomed the information on the reduction in youth crime and thanked Officers for their hard work and commitment to working with young people to ensure this continued. However, he was disappointed to note that the youth court in Hartlepool would be transferred to Teesside. It was considered that this would put additional pressures on Officers to ensure the young people arrived at court as a failure to attend could result in a warrant for their arrest being issued. There was concern expressed that this decision had not been taken locally nor had any local consultation been undertaken. It was suggested that a minor reorganisation of how the local courts operated would enable young people to attend court without coming into contact with established criminals. The Chair confirmed that as a result of concerns expressed by Policy Committee Chairs, representations were made to the Courts to prevent the migration of services to Teesside and the response received was that the decision had already been made. There were a number of concerns expressed by Members that this could be the beginning of the migration of more services to Teesside which would result in less of a local service and more empty buildings within the town. It was noted that as well as contacting the Police and Crime Commissioner, representations should also be made to the Chief Constable.

A Member referred to the increase in hate crime and commented that people needed to be confident enough to be able to report such crimes to the Police. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods commented that any increase in crime could be that people were more confident to report crimes and a lot of work had been undertaken with the Police and black, minority and ethnic communities as well as Hart Gables, Harbour to ensure people were confident to report Hate crimes.

The Chair commented that as Chair of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership all the comments made today would be taken on board and confirmed that a lot of in house training and awareness raising had been undertaken in relation to hate crime. There was concern at the increase in shoplifting as it had been noted that a lot of shoplifting was for food and it was suggested that this may be due to the implementation of the welfare reforms and resulting increase in deprivation levels in the town. The importance of dovetailing priorities around the Better Care Fund with the Health and Wellbeing Board and social value monies from the Enterprise Partnership to analyse hot spots in wards.

A Member sought clarification on the budget for the Partnership and the allocation for publicity. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods confirmed that this year the Police and Crime Commissioner had allocated £78,110 to the Partnership for the Hartlepool area which had been used to commission services, an allocation from the Early Intervention Grant was used to fund youth activities in the community and public health monies were used to commission drug and alcohol treatment services. It was highlighted that the Safer Hartlepool Partnership no longer had specific funds for communication, publicity and awareness raising around the Partnership work was undertaken by the in-house Public Relations team in association with representatives from other partners.

A Member requested a list of members of the Communications Group of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods indicated that this information would be forwarded to Members of the Committee.

Decision

- 1) The draft Community Safety Plan 2014/17 was noted.
- 2) That representations be made to the Police Constable in relation to the migration of the Youth service to Stockton.

193. Polling District and Polling Place Review (*Chief Solicitor*)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference CE63/13.

Purpose of report

To consider and review proposals for alternative polling districts and polling places to be used at future elections.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places that had to be undertaken. The aim of the review was to ensure that all electors had such reasonable facilities for voting as were practicable. As part of the review, the unavailability of some polling stations had been identified and alternative venues investigated. In addition, comments received from Elected Members, polling station staff and the electorate were also considered. Attached at Appendix B were details of the affected polling districts together with the existing and proposed polling places which were within the Fens and Rossmere, Foggy Furze and Jesmond Wards.

Decision

- 1) The revised polling district arrangement in Fens and Rossmere as detailed in Appendix D was approved.
- 2) The proposed change in polling place in Foggy Furze was approved.
- 3) The position in regard to the Polling Station in Fens and Rossmere – Polling District CA and the reconfiguration of Polling Districts CB and CC was approved.
- 4) The revised polling district arrangement and polling station location in Jesmond Ward was approved.

194. Disposal of Surplus Assets – Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment – Council Owned Sites (Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)

Type of decision

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

Purpose of report

To seek approval to include a number of Council owned sites for consideration as part of the Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment (SHLAA).

To outline the justification of the selection of the sites proposed having regard to the overall Council asset portfolio.

To seek approval for the sites identified to be submitted for consideration that they will be made available for development within the plan period should they be deemed suitable for residential development.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the development of a new Local Plan particularly in relation to the Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment (SHLAA). As the SHLAA required the assessment of sites in excess of 0.4ha (1 acre) the Estates Manager had in conjunction with the Planning Policy Officers, reviewed the whole estate and selected sites which were considered appropriate for inclusion within the SHLAA process. The schedule of proposed sites for inclusion was attached at Appendix 1. Also attached at Appendix 2 were lists of all the Council's property and land assets which had been reviewed in order to compile the proposals list. It was proposed to put forward for inclusion in the SHLAA, the sites listed in the schedule at Appendix 1 and exclude those on Appendix 2. The sites being put forward were being submitted on the basis that they were available during the plan period and may be suitable for residential development.

A Member questioned the cost to the Council of clearing Council-owned derelict land of fly-tipping. The Assistant Director, Regeneration indicated that this would depend on the specifics of the site and how often it had required clearing. The Chair commented that further reports would be presented to Committee and this information could be included within those subsequent reports.

Decision

- 1) The Schedule of Sites identified within Appendix 1 in its entirety be approved and the Schedule of Sites not considered suitable was noted.
- 2) That future reports on this issue submitted to the Committee include information on the cost to the Council of clearance of Council owned sites due to fly-tipping.

195. Property Strategy (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To outline the benefits of adopting a formal asset management/property strategy, seeking approval to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's operational and non-operational portfolio whilst also considering the opportunity to create an arms length property/investment company to deliver the Council's regeneration and operational property ambitions.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided a detailed and comprehensive background on the asset management, development and regeneration, capital receipts and non-operational property. In addition there was information on managing operational property maintaining front line services, community asset transfer and property maintenance running costs. A list of operation and non-operational assets was attached by way of appendix. The key priorities and action plan were included at Appendix C.

A Member requested that update reports on the actions from the plan be submitted to the Committee on a 6 monthly basis. In addition, it was requested that Elected Members should be consulted before any decisions were taken on issues affecting their individual wards to enable Members to be fully engaged with the process.

A Member congratulated Officers for their continued excellent work but offered a word of caution to be mindful when increasing rent so as not to counter the affects of potential increased income by businesses moving out of town or reducing their staffing capacity therefore increasing unemployment. The importance of securing long term sustainability and affordability was echoed.

A Member sought clarification on the costs associated with maintaining Council-owned assets. The Assistant Director, Regeneration commented that this was an essential component part of asset management and information would be included in future reports to the Committee. In addition, a Member requested costings on the buildings and land that were leased to the Council be included in a future report to the Committee.

Decision

- 1) The proposals to support the ambition to fundamentally review and challenge the land holdings of the Council was accepted.
- 2) That the actions set out in the Action Plan attached at Appendix C be implemented and that six-monthly update reports be submitted to the Committee including the associated maintenance costs of all Council-owned assets.
- 3) That Ward Councillors be consulted on any proposals within their Ward areas to ensure they were fully engaged in the process.
- 4) That a future report to the Committee include the costings associated with buildings and land that were leased to the Council.

196. Future Delivery of the Council's Supernumerary Apprenticeship Programme *(Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To request that Finance and Policy Committee determines the future delivery of the Council's Supernumerary Apprenticeship programme and the pay and terms and conditions for apprentices.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the current arrangements for the Apprenticeship programme. It was noted that the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services had previously requested that potential procurement options for the provision of an apprenticeship programme be explored to ensure best value was achieved. The report outlined the following options for Members' consideration:

Option 1 – An ATA (Apprenticeship Training Agency) being the Employer (current model);

Option 2 – The Council being the employer;

Option 3 – The Council set up as an ATA.

There were a number of conditions of service that would apply to apprentices that Members were asked to consider including:

- Annual Leave and Sickness Entitlements
- Local Government Pension Scheme
- Rates of Pay
- Future delivery of training for apprentices

A Member sought clarification on the costs associated with sick pay for apprentices. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the report proposed that the Council's sickness entitlements apply to all apprentices with effect from 1 April 2014. Further clarification was sought on the level of qualification a young person required in order to secure a place on the apprenticeship programme. The Assistant Chief Executive indicated he would check that information and forward it to all Members of the Committee.

A Member suggested that recommendation g) be amended to indicate that “The Regeneration Services Committee considers the future direction of Adult Education, including whether it was appropriate for them to be able to deliver the training aspects of the Council’s supernumerary apprenticeship provision”.

In response to a query from a Member in relation to the future procurement of this service, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that there were only two ATA’s operating in the northern region, one in Hartlepool and one in Gateshead. It was highlighted that under the proposals included in the report, the only financial implications to the Council would be reduced staffing costs to manage apprentices and direct salary costs of apprentices to be paid at nationally agreed rate of pay.

Decision

- 1) That an ATA continue to be the employer in respect of the Council’s apprentices.
- 2) The 1 year procurement exemption be exercised so that the partnership arrangement with HCFE for the deliver of the Council’s Supernumerary Apprenticeship Programme for new apprentices can continue until 31 August 2015 and be reviewed in advance of the exemption expiring.
- 3) The Council’s annual leave and sickness entitlements as noted in the report apply with effect from 1 April 2014.
- 4) It was noted that apprentices can access the Local Government Pension Scheme regardless of who employs the apprentices.
- 5) That apprentices continue to be paid the current rates (Option 1 of Table 2 – 31 apprentices).
- 6) That the Regeneration Services Committee consider the future direction for Adult Education, including whether it was appropriate for them to be able to deliver the training aspects of the Council’s supernumerary apprentice provision.
- 7) That additional information on the qualification requirements to secure a placement on the Apprenticeship Programme be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

197. Council Tax Base 2014/15 (Chief Finance Officer)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

The report sought approval to a calculated Council Tax Base for 2014/15 which will be used for council tax billing purposes. The report included two tax base calculations, Option 1 was based on adopting a 12% cut in Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) for 2014/15, Option 2 shows the Tax Base if the 2013/14 805% cut in LCTS continued into 2014/15. Members were asked to approve either Calculation A or B depending on the decision made by full Council on 30 January as to the agreed LCTS Scheme for 2014/15.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information and the process to be undertaken on the calculation of Local Authorities' Council Tax Base. It was proposed that following the decision of Council on 30 January 2014 regarding the 2014/15 Local Council Tax Support Scheme, the following two options were provided for Members' consideration:

Option 1 – On the basis of a 12% LCTS cut for 2014/15

- a) Approve a Hartlepool BC Council Tax Base for 2014/15 of 21,900.8.
- b) Approve a Council Tax Base for those Parishes who intend to levy a precept upon the Council's General Fund:

Dalton Piercy	100.7	Elwick	446.0
Greatham	566.3	Hart	287.3
Newton Bewley	30.3	Headland	683.9

Option 2 – On the basis of a 8.5% LCTS cut for 2014/15

- a) Approve a Hartlepool BC Council Tax Base for 2014/15 of 21,900.8.
- b) Approve a Council Tax Base for those Parishes who intend to levy a precept upon the Council's General Fund:

Dalton Piercy	100.6	Elwick	445.8
Greatham	565.3	Hart	287.2
Newton Bewley	30.3	Headland	680.6

Decision

Following the decision of full Council on 30 January 2014 regarding the 2014/15 Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Members approved Option 1 as noted above for the 2014/15 Council Tax Base.

198. Digital First (*Assistant Chief Executive*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To provide Members with details of the Government's Digital Strategy.

Explain the steps the Authority was seeking to take to provide alternative, electronic, channels of communication for the Authority's customers to use.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided detailed background information on Digital First which was the movement or channel swift in providing services away from traditional methods to modern, electronic means with the potential for self service with some services being available 24/7. The Assistant Chief Executive indicated that this was not about removing face to face contact but was about trying to find digital avenues for those people who wanted to use them. Digital First will introduce more flexibility with enhanced arrangements for people to contact the Council rather than stripping out current routes.

A number of proposals were outlined in the report and included the availability of public information, the Council's website, interactive telephony and social media. In conclusion, it was highlighted that Digital First was a new way of communicating with the Authority's customers and offered the opportunity to customers who may not have interacted with the Authority before to the improved number of access channels available.

The roll out of Digital First would be on a phased basis to ensure the evaluation of each phase was undertaken. A detailed evaluation of the potential benefits specific to Hartlepool was required and as such, a business case would be the subject of a further report to this Committee.

There were some concerns expressed by a Member at the limited accessibility to computers within community buildings such as libraries, especially as more Government services were accessible online. The

Assistant Chief Executive indicated that in recognising this, it was noted that as the provision of Council services changes, consideration would be given to any surplus ICT facilities being utilised in libraries and other areas. It was acknowledged that the computer usage within the Central Library was very positive and at times close to capacity. The Chair commented that this could be considered as part of the future report to be submitted to the Committee in relation to the social value of the ICT contract. A Member noted that where ICT facilities were offered within community buildings, it was well utilised as people recognised ICT as a necessity rather than a luxury.

The Assistant Chief Executive commented that the information on the Council's website was generally very good but the navigation tools for the website could be improved. A review of the website was being undertaken and would look at simplifying access with key information and big hitting information being more readily available. The Assistant Director, Regeneration commented that the introduction of welfare reform and access to on line job seekers to search for jobs had resulted in an increase in online access.

A member of the public in attendance questioned how many computers were accessible in community buildings. The Chair responded that this information would be sent out to that member of the public direct.

Decision

Members approved in principal the adoption of a Digital First Strategy encompassing:

- A modern interactive website;
- Expansion of interactive telephony where appropriate for both the customer and the service;
- Establishing a more proactive presence on Social Media sites;
- Undertaking activities to reduce digital exclusion.

199. Advice and Guidance Project *(Assistant Director, Resources)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To seek Finance and Policy Committee's approval to the proposals to reconfigure the Council's Advice and Guidance services to the public.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the creation and progress of the Advice and Guidance project. The project proposed that the advice and guidance functions be provided via an Advice and Guidance Hub; Customer Services Centre and the Benefits Service (Housing Benefits/Local Council Tax Support). The operation and resourcing of the proposal was outlined in the report. It was noted that the Options Centre currently located within Park Towers would be relocated to the Civic Centre and would be near to the Advice and Guidance Hub due to the fact that they would undoubtedly be working with the same customers. The intention was to have a phased introduction over 6 months starting from April 2014.

It was proposed that those services with “customer contact” would be located adjacent to each other on Level 2 and would include:

- Customer Services Centre
- Advice and Guidance Hub
- Housing Services (including Housing Options)
- Benefits Team.

Some staff from the Hub would be located within the reception area to enable the meeting rooms to be utilised for more detailed and personal matters. It was noted that West View Advice and Resource Centre currently provided independent advice including debt advice, money advice, benefits advice and housing/homelessness advice and was managed by the Community Regeneration Team. However, there was currently a tender exercise being undertaken for those services.

The financial implications of the project were outlined in the report including the available funding as identified in the MTFS to avoid a General Fund budget pressure.

Members congratulated the Assistant Director, Resources for undertaken such a detailed and comprehensive piece of work which articulated to Members how services will operate in the future and about how services would be integrated to drive customer care. A Member highlighted that he was pleased to note that the option of home visits to residents who found it difficult to visit the Civic Centre was included in the proposals.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director, Resources confirmed that the main principle of the Hub was to channel people to Officers who were skilled and trained to cover a whole range of issues to enable them to get further with their first contact. The Chair commented that the First Contact Support Hub had a high ethos of customer care and this proposal would enable a full service that was rounded rather than a fragmented approach and this was endorsed.

At this point in the meeting Councillors Cook and Simmons declared

personal interests in this item in relation to the West View Advice and Resource Centre.

A Member commented that the proposals provided confidence that the safeguarding of young people, children and vulnerable adults would be maintained to a high level whilst adding that the phased implementation would ensure safety was properly addressed.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director, Resources confirmed that any costs associated with this proposal would be undertaken within existing resources wherever possible.

The importance of ensuring that residents were claiming the benefits they were entitled to was reiterated by a Member. The Chair added that this proposal was in the spirit of strategic direction Members wanted and was exactly how it was envisaged.

In relation to the 3 year funding of the local welfare support and the transfer of existing staff to the Advice and Guidance Hub, the Chair sought clarification on the future of their substantive posts within the Council. It was highlighted that there needed to be a clear demarcation on the migration of services transferring into the Hub to support discretionary housing payments and local welfare support. In addition, it was noted that the re-evaluation of back office services and roles would need to be undertaken as part of the budget considerations for 2015/16. A review of resources within the Hub will be undertaken after 6 months.

A Member expressed concern that people may still need to see more than one person when visiting the Civic Centre. The Chair commented that a programme of training and development would be in place for staff transferring into the Hub with their knowledge and skill base increasing over a period of time and with experience. The Assistant Director, Resources indicated that people will be redirected, if required, as soon as possible once they have made their initial query. A Member highlighted that there would no doubt always be an element of re-direction needed once the appropriate questions were asked of the individual customer.

A Member questioned the success of the implementation of the welfare reforms. The Chief Finance Officer commented that the implementation of the welfare reforms was being managed well and he was not aware of any complaints received.

In response to a question from a Member, the Chief Executive commented that as this proposal involved a number of changes to service delivery and therefore changing roles, it was imperative that all roles involved be re-evaluated to uphold the integrity of the Council's job evaluation scheme. It was noted that staff employed within the Registration Service would be included within the re-evaluation due to the changes in reporting arrangements and to ensure the proposal was fair and equitable across all staff involved.

Whilst a Member supported the 'triage' system that would be in place as part of this proposal, he indicated that any move to the introduction of signage to point people to specific areas of the reception that would identify individual problems would be strongly resisted. The Assistant Director, Resources, reassured the Members that this was not the intention.

Decision

- 1) Members comments be noted in particular to the permanent nature of the posts transferring into the Advice and Guidance Hub and the associated substantive posts.
- 2) The proposals to reconfigure the Council's Advice and Guidance Services to the public be approved.
- 3) It was noted that the MTFS report included a specific recommendation to allocate the available Local Welfare Support as detailed in paragraph 10.6 over a three year period (ie 2014/15 to 2016/17).

Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager left the meeting at this point.

200. Council Communications and Public Relations

(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods and Assistant Chief Executive)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To provide Members of the Committee with the current considerations and plans in respect of Council Communications and Public Relations.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report outlined the current arrangements in place across the Council for the co-ordination in respect of Communications and Public Relations. There were a number of potential changes and benefits to be considered by Members and these were set out in the report. There were three options for Members to consider and included:

- 1) Stay as currently are.
- 2) Provide a consolidated approach to communications and public relations linked to other related aspects.
- 3) Create a consolidated publication relations, marketing and events team.

There were a number of immediate changes that could be implemented including the creation of an events calendar and ongoing communication in relation to events and activities to be co-ordinated by the Public Relations Team; all external communications co-ordinated through the Public Relations Team; and that internal communications relating to events and activities and similar are co-ordinated and issued through the Public Relations Team to an agreed timeframe.

There were a number of areas for further development and these were detailed in the report.

Councillor Ray Martin-Wells left the meeting at this point.

A Member expressed concerns that the report did not contain the information previously requested by Members and questioned the income generation currently in place within the Public Relations Team. The Assistant Chief Executive responded that excluding income from schools, the Public Relations Team realised around £30k income. In response to clarification from a Member, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that around 2.25 of the 3 full time equivalents were funded from within the current budget with the remainder being covered from income generation.

In relation to the increase in the number of FTE posts, the Chief Executive commented that this was the only section where an increase in the establishment had been identified and this was done with the direction of Members to ensure that the marketing function for the Council was undertaken fully. In response to a question around the costs of spending on marketing, public relations, leaflets, brochures etc, the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods commented that the way budgets were configured, it would be difficult to identify these costs across individual Departments. The Chair suggested that a further report be submitted to the Committee around the implementation of the recommendations providing rounded figures on the investment return in view of Members' anxieties in relation to marketing costs.

A Member moved option 3 and requested a further report on centralising the Communications and Public Relations functions which was seconded.

The Chief Executive responded that in his view, this proposal took account of Members' previous decisions. He added that an element of the marketing function could be included in many Officers' duties in one way or another and would be difficult to identify specifically. It was noted that further training in marketing and imagery would enable the current Public Relations Team to increase output and create additional income. The Chair indicated his support for option 2 as this would enable a full communications and public relations service to be delivered and co-ordinated with further reports being submitted to this Committee as each stage was implemented with the aim of moving towards option 3 in the future. In referring to the 'Vision' for Hartlepool which was launched earlier

this week, a Member commented that it pays to advertise whilst ensuring money was spent well and effectively. A Member seconded option 2 as a proposal provided that this was a staged approach progressing towards option 3.

A member of the public in attendance addressed the Committee and suggested a word of caution on the use of social media as well as commenting that the Council's current website was complex and not tablet or mobile phone friendly.

In discussing the options further and the potential to progress to Option 3, the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods indicated that a further report would be submitted to the Committee explaining what will stay within the Public Relations Team and what will be undertaken elsewhere within the Council and will outline the collaborative approach to the public relations and communications function of the Council. The Chair added that this report should cover all the anxieties expressed by Members as noted above and include expenditure and income generation across other services areas that contribute to the public relations and communications function. This would enable Members to consider if further migration of services was required.

The Assistant Director, Regeneration commented that there was a distinct difference between public relations, communications and marketing. For example, marketing expertise was about understanding the specific audience including the demographic profile, the spend capacity of users and how they respond to different types of media, transferring this responsibility away from services would be detrimental. Once this was identified, the public relations element takes over and engages with that.

Decision

- (1) That Option 2 was approved with a further report to be submitted to the Committee for consideration covering the anxieties expressed by Members as noted above, including the expenditure and income generation across all service areas that contribute to the public relations and communications function with further consideration of Option 3 in the future.
- (2) That the immediate changes as outlined above and identified within section 8 of the report be agreed for implementation.

At this point in the meeting:

Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager rejoined the meeting.

Councillor Geoff Lilley left the meeting.

Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive, Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer and Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor left the meeting.

201. Chief Executive's Department Structure *(Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To outline to Members the new structural arrangements in the Chief Executive's Department and to seek approval to a reconfiguration within Divisions.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the new Senior Officer Structure and extensive exercise undertaken by the Assistant Director, Resources on the creation of an Advice and Guidance Hub. The final structure underpinning this function will have a major impact on the Chief Executive's Department structure namely Legal, Finance and Corporate Services.

In relation to the Finance Division it was proposed that the Chief Finance Officer become the Cleveland Fire Authority's Section 151 Officer from April 2014. In addition, as a result of the Advice and Guidance proposals, several staff would transfer into the Hub to deal with Local Welfare Support Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme with further staff transferring from September next year due to expansion of the Advice and Guidance Hub and Universal Credit. Further reports would be submitted to Members as and when this information is available.

Within the Assistant Chief Executive's Division, in line with the previous report on Communications and Public Relations, it was proposed to strengthen the Public Relations section through the inclusion of one of the newly created apprenticeship posts. This together with funding from Public Health in order to co-ordinated the Health message would mean an enhanced Public Relations function.

It was not proposed to undertake any structural alterations within the Legal Division, however proposals for savings in future years were likely to be larger and may result in structural changes to the Division.

Councillors Robbie Payne and Carl Richardson declared a personal interest at this point in the meeting as Chair of Cleveland Fire Authority.

Members were pleased to note that the Cleveland Fire Authority would gain from the benefit of the Chief Finance Officer's expertise and advice as Section 151 Officer as well as generating income for the Authority.

Whilst Members acknowledged the need to make further cuts due to the level of budget savings required, they recognised the additional pressures this would place on Officers. It was suggested by Members that a radical review of the Legal Services should be undertaken in the fullest sense, including a review the staffing structure, exploration of collaboration and shared services to avoid losing front line services wherever possible. A Member suggested that the costs associated with receiving advice from Counsel and the justification for seeking this advice should be explored further.

The Chief Executive added that a fundamental point of the future service provision was to look at how services were provided and whether they could be provided in a more cost effective way. The key issue was to ensure that all services were functioning and functioning well. Members were congratulated in their previous decision making which had kept redundancies down to a tiny proportion, however this could not continue in the future as the majority of the Council's budgetary expenditure was associated with staff.

A Member suggested that providing legal services outside the Council would generate income and should be explored further. The Chief Executive commented that this would be a complex process.

Decision

- 1) That the Chief Finance Officer becomes the Section 151 Officer for the Cleveland Fire Authority.
- 2) That the movement of staff and associated functions into the Advice and Guidance Hub be noted.
- 3) That the reconfiguration of the Public Relations Section be noted.
- 4) That further reports be brought to this Committee as the financial landscape changes and re-evaluation following the migration of services into the Advice and Guidance Hub.
- 5) That further exploration of the costs associated with and justification of seeking the advice of Counsel be undertaken.

Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive, Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer and Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor rejoined the meeting.

202. Victoria Buildings – Lease Renewal (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To seek approval to renew the lease on Victoria Buildings, 6-8 Tower Street, Hartlepool for the continued occupation by the Adult Education Service.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the current location of the Adult Education Service in Victoria Buildings in Tower Street. It was noted that a full appraisal of all Council owned buildings had been undertaken and there were currently no suitable buildings with sufficient capacity, standard of accommodation and in an appropriate location to fulfil the deliver requirements of the service. It was therefore proposed that the Council renew the lease on the Victoria Buildings from 20 November 2013 for a 5 year period for the continued delivery of the Adult Education Service. The proposed terms were attached at confidential Appendix A. **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.** The building had been significantly altered to suit the needs of the service and it was highlighted that the existing premises were considered to be ideal for the delivery of the service as recognised in a recent OFSTED report.

Members questioned whether there were any suitable buildings elsewhere within Council ownership. The Chief Executive confirmed that all Council-owned buildings had been examined and none were suitable. The Chair commented that the provision of this service in the existing premises fit with the future development of the Innovation and Skills Quarter in that area of the town. It was also noted that the rental charges for the existing building had been negotiated at a reduced rate, as such there was no break clause for the duration of the lease contract. The Assistant Director, Regeneration added that the Adult Education Service was fully funded from external resources. In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director, Regeneration indicated he would forward the details of the owners of the building to Members.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the points raised by Members but could not justify the sourcing and conversion of an alternative building when these premises were ideal and located in an area to be developed as the Innovation and Skills Quarter (ISQ). The Chair commented that this was a cost neutral proposal and would support the development of the ISQ. However, it was requested that any future proposals to renew any lease agreements be reported to Finance and Policy Committee for Members' consideration.

Decision

- 1) That the Council enter into a new 5-year lease agreement on the subject premises for the continued delivery of the Adult Education Service subject to the re-negotiated terms.
- 2) That the future renewal of any lease agreements be submitted to the Finance and Policy Committee for Members' consideration.

203. Proposals for Inclusion in Council Plan 2014/15 *(Chief Executive's and Public Health Teams)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To provide the opportunity for the Finance and Policy Committee to consider the proposals for inclusion in the 2014-15 Council Plan that fall under the remit of the Committee for the Chief Executive's and Public Health Departments.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the review of the Outcome Framework which was to be implemented from April 2014. As in previous years, detailed proposals were considered by each Committee throughout January and February in respect of their areas of responsibility and a further report would be submitted to the Committee on 14 February detailing the comments/observations made by those Committees along with a full draft of the 2014/15 Council Plan.

The Chief Executive and Director of Public Health provided short presentations which detailed the key challenges that the Council faced over the next year and beyond, set out the proposals from the Departments and how these will be addressed. The outcomes that fall under the remit of the Finance and Policy Committee from the Chief Executive's and Public Health Departmental Plans were outlined in the report.

Councillor Robbie Payne left the meeting at this point.

Clarification was sought on where the outcomes expected from the Better Care Fund would be. The Director of Public Health responded that they would be part of the Child and Adult Services Department although there would be some cross-over with the Public Health Department.

A Member questioned whether the Advice and Guidance Hub would be included in relation to the Welfare Reform changes and the implementation of the Benefits and Free School Meals. It was also noted that a number of the Council's policies and plans included on the website were out of date. The Assistant Chief Executive added that all the above points were included within the Plan.

It was suggested that within Section 2 of Outcome 30, the review of the DHP funding should be undertaken by the manager of the Advice and Guidance Hub as part of the Advice and Guidance Hub and that the Housing Benefit element of the Universal Credit Roll Out should be the responsibility of the Chief Finance Officer, in conjunction with the manager of the Advice and Guidance Hub. It was requested that both the above points be addressed in the final draft of the Council Plan to be submitted to this Committee on 14 February.

Decision

- 1) The outcome templates (Appendix A and B) were agreed for inclusion within the 2014/15 Council Plan.
- 2) That within Section 2, Outcome 30 – the review of the DHP funding' should be undertaken by the manager of the Advice and Guidance Hub as part of the Advice and Guidance Hub
- 3) That within Section 2, Outcome 30 – the Housing Benefit element of the Universal Credit Roll Out should be the responsibility of the Chief Finance Officer, in conjunction with the manager of the Advice and Guidance Hub.

204. Smoking – Cessation and Tobacco Control (*Director of Public Health*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To update Members on the approaches being taken by Hartlepool Borough Council and partners to reduce smoking prevalence in the town.

To seek Member views on the approaches being taken and gain support for the action plan developed, implemented and monitored by Hartlepool's Smokefree Alliance.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided detailed information on the prevalence of smoking which remained the single biggest preventable cause of premature death in the UK. It was noted that Hartlepool Borough Council currently co-ordinated a multi-partnership Smoke Free Hartlepool Alliance which aimed to reduce smoking prevalence in the Town. The Alliance developed, implemented and monitored an annual action plan which captured the range of the work being undertaken. Hartlepool Borough Council had recently signed up to the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control and received support on this from health partners through the Health and Wellbeing Board. In addition, the Council had also signed up to the Smokefree Action Coalition, an act that was being strongly encouraged to all North East localities and co-ordinated tobacco control nationally and provided invaluable insight and updates on suggested action at a local level to support the regional and national picture.

It was noted that preventing the uptake of smoking in children and making no smoking the norm in the town was a high priority and one action currently being pursued was to make all children's playgrounds in Hartlepool smoke free. As well as preventing the uptake of smoking in children and young people, there was currently a lack of support specifically for young people who want to quit smoking and local insight work had recently been undertaken to rectify this.

A number of samples of 'electronic' cigarettes were handed to Members at the meeting who were shocked at the level of nicotine contained within some of these devices. The Head of Health Improvement commented that whilst the need to contain nicotine within these devices was recognised, the devices did not support the breaking of the physical habit of smoking. A Member questioned whether the devices would have had any medical testing done prior to being available on the open market. The Head of Health Improvement indicated that as they were not marketed as medicine, there was no requirement for this type of testing to be undertaken. However, it was hoped that through the European Parliament, these products will ultimately be regulated and licensed as medicines.

A Member sought clarification on whether these devices could be used in no smoking areas. The Head of Health Improvement confirmed that the Council's No Smoking Policy had recently been reviewed and did not allow smoking of any kind, including these devices during working hours.

Officers were congratulated for the amount of work being done to encourage people to stop smoking but there were concerns that these alternative devices may be damaging people's health. It was suggested that a raising awareness campaign be undertaken in conjunction with the Public Relations Team to promote the work currently being done to reduce the prevalence of smoking in the town.

Decision

- 1) The content of the report and the actions being taken to reduce the prevalence of smoking in Hartlepool were noted.
- 2) That a public awareness campaign be undertaken in conjunction with the Public Relations Team to promote the work currently being done to reduce the prevalence of smoking in the town.

205. Financial Assistance Provided to Businesses *(Assistant Director, Regeneration)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide Members with details of the financial assistance provided to support the creation and growth of businesses and corresponding job creation in the Town and provided details of the awards made in the first 6 months of the financial year 2013/14.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report detailed the current financial assistance regimes operated by the Council to support individuals into self employment, together with schemes to support enterprise and business development. Details of actual approvals for the last financial year were provided in confidential Appendix 1. **This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A of the 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).**

Following an internal audit, changes had been made to the financial assistance decision making process and these were detailed in the report. In addition, the Economic Regeneration Team was in the process of developing a procurement system for specialist business support, largely offered through the incubation bursary and the access to market schemes. All the approved schemes were monitored over an initial 6 months period to ensure all financial criteria were met and details of how this monitoring was undertaken was included in the report.

It was noted that the MTFs report included a recommendation to create a reserve of £130,000 to be used to supplement the core funding available in 2014/15 and 2015/16. This will ensure that the current level of support

could continue to be provided for a further two years with no additional revenue burden to the Council.

The Chair reiterated the need to avoid duplication with people applying for financial assistance on more than one occasion.

A member of the public in attendance addressed the Committee and asked for clarification on how people apply for financial assistance. The Assistant Director, Regeneration confirmed that financial assistance can be applied for through the Economic Regeneration Team located in Hartlepool Enterprise Centre or through the Council's website.

The Chief Executive congratulated Officers on a good report that included positive information on the support offered to local businesses.

Decision

- 1) The grant awards for the first 6 months of 2013/14 financial year were noted.
- 2) The changes made to the grant decision process of awards up to £5,500 and the development of a professional advisor procurement framework were noted.
- 3) It was noted that the MTFs report included a recommendation to create a reserve of £130,000 using the surplus generated on the Future Jobs Fund, to provide one off funding for Business Grants in 2014/15 and 2015/16 as outlined in the report.

206. Update on Recent Changes to the Council's Procurement Related Practices *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To update the Committee with recent changes to the Council's procurement related practices, several of which had been at the instigation of the Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided a brief background on a number of issues that had arisen recently which impacted on the Council's procurement practices. Attached at Appendix A was a document which was the Procurement Policy

Note (PPN) which had already been circulated around the Council. A summary of the issues included within that document was included in the report.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods confirmed that the Council did not deal with any firms found guilty of blacklisting.

Decision

The contents of the report were noted.

207. 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 is not payable/receivable.
- Receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted to these Contract Procedure Rules.

Issue(s) for consideration

Attached at Appendix A was the detailed information for each procurement tender issued since the last quarterly report. Details of the required information in relation to Contract Procedure Rules exemptions granted since the last Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts was also attached at Appendix B.

A table including all the commercial information in respect of the tenders received was attached at confidential Appendix C. **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 contents of the report were noted.

208. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 1.12 pm

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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