

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

7 DECEMBER 2015

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

Present:

Councillor Christopher Akers Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Allan Barclay, Kevin Cranney, Marjorie James, Brenda Loynes, Carl Richardson, Chris Simmons, Kayleigh Sirs, George Springer and Paul Thompson.

Officers: Gill Alexander, Chief Executive
Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive
Chris Little, Chief Finance Officer
Alyson Carman, Legal Services Manager
Sally Robinson, Director of Child and Adult Services
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

127. Apologies for Absence

None.

128. Declarations of Interest

None.

129. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November, 2015

Received.

130. Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee and Regeneration Services Committee held on 23 November, 2015.

Received.

131. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 16 October, 2015

Received.

132. Promoting Change, Transforming Lives Project
(*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods / Director of Child and Adult Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to:

- (i) Inform members that the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities Programme Grant Letter for the Promoting Change, Transforming Lives Project has been signed and returned prior to the deadline of Monday 12th October 2015.
- (ii) Seek approval for the £21,000 capital contribution from the remaining balance of the Short Breaks Capital Funding Scheme. This funding is the residual balance from 2013/14 and was to support carers and people with disabilities.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Regeneration reported that the Big Lottery Fund informed the Council on 14th September 2015 that the funding for the Promoting Change, Transforming Lives Project had been approved; however this was subject to a press/public announcement embargo until 13th October 2015. The Grant Letter confirmed the allocation of £400,000 from Big Lottery for the project that would be delivered from 1st January 2016 to 31st December 2020.

The report outlined the next stages of the process and confirmed the overall value for the Promoting Change, Transforming Lives Project at £496,000. The grant from the Big Lottery Fund was £400,000, £21,000 was being requested from the Council's Short Break Capital Fund to fund a new toilet block and the Council would provide match funding of £75,000. The match funding included staffing budgets from the Economic Regeneration Employment Link Team of £55,000. The remaining £20,000 would be covered by a contribution of £2,000 p.a. from existing revenue budgets by both the Child and Adult and Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Departments.

In addition, a total of £45,000 income generation had been projected for

years 3, 4 and 5. This would be re-invested into the project, however this would not impact on the project as the generated funds would only be spent if earned.

A Member questioned why the capital costs for the toilet block had not formed part of the original bid to the Big Lottery. The Chair of the Regeneration Services Committee indicated that at the time of the bid the need for a new toilet block had not been identified, only when the bid had been successful had it been identified that the toilet block was needed for the project. A member of the public questioned the position of the Volunteer Coordinator. The Chair indicated that this was a paid role that coordinated all the various volunteers that would be involved with the project.

The Chair referred to the wider works that were scheduled for the Rift House Recreation Ground which need to be coordinated with the capital works that formed part of this project. The Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Committee also indicated that the committee had recently approved traffic calming and resurfacing works in the Waverley Terrace area (Minute No. 37 “Wordsworth Avenue – Traffic Calming Scheme” refers) and these also needed to be scheduled in coordination with the capital works for the project to minimise disruption and maximise the benefit from the contracts.

Decision

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the virement of £21,000 from the Short Breaks capital budget to fund the toilet block works be approved.
3. That any capital works required in implementing the project be coordinated with the general improvement works proposed for the adjacent Rift House Recreation Ground and the traffic calming and resurfacing works approved by the Neighbourhood Services Committee for the Wordsworth Avenue area.

133. Strategic Financial Management Report - as at 30th September 2015 *(Corporate Management Team)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

The purposes of the report were to inform Members of:

- i) the 2015/16 Forecast General Fund Outturn;
- ii) Corporate Income Collection Performance; and
- iii) the 2015/16 Capital Programme Monitoring.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Chief Finance Officer reported that there had been no change to the overall forecast outturn. The overall 2015/16 budget position for the Council showed that there was a forecast net under spend (including the reserve review) of between £1,058,000 and £1,278,000 to manage the impact if the actual 2016/17 grant cut is higher than forecast.

The Chief Finance Officer advised Members that there would be a further report to Committee outlining a strategy for using the £118,000 income received from Housing Hartlepool for house sales for the first six months of the financial year.

In terms of the overall Business Rates collection rate, at 30 September 2015 the Council had collected 60.65% of the 2015/16 liability, down slightly by 0.55% compared to the same period last year. The overall Council Tax collection rate at 30 September 2015 was 53.9% compared to 54.12% for the same period last year, down slightly by 0.22%. This position largely reflected the ongoing impact of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme. In 2014/15, the Council collected 95.4% of the Council Tax due, slightly below the average of North Eastern Councils of 95.9% (the range was 93.6% to 97.7%). Collection performance was being impacted by the time lag in recovering Council Tax by Attachment of Benefit, where the rate of deduction was capped at £3.70 per week and only one deduction can be active at any one time.

The Council also collected significant Sundry Debts income for the payment of services provided by the Council. In total £12.759m of sundry debts were raised in the first six months of 2015/16. As at 30 September 2015, £10.714m (83.97%) of this amount had been collected. Robust procedures for collecting the remaining outstanding debt were in place.

Details of the Capital budget were also reported. Actual expenditure to 30th September 2015 was £10.034m, compared to a 2015/16 budget of £31.370m, leaving £18.041m to be spent in 2015/16. At this stage anticipated expenditure and resources of £2.286m would be re-phased into 2016/17.

A Member of the public questioned if the impact of the new business rates arrangements were known and would the Council benefit through the retention of business rates. The Chief Finance Officer stated that at this time no assessment could be made as the details had yet to be issued by government.

Decision

That the report be noted.

134. Quarter 2 – Council Overview of Performance and Risk 2015/16 *(Assistant Chief Executive)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

To inform Finance and Policy Committee of the progress made against the 2015/16 Council Plan, for the period ending 30 September 2015.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Chief Executive updated the Committee on performance across the Council's departments against the performance indicators and risks outlined in the Council Plan. Following the decision at the meeting on 16 October, the report included an update on the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) which was nil so far in 2015/16.

There were a number of amendments to risks and actions identified and the report also highlighted the interventions that had been instigated in relation to –

CAD 15/16 LLS02 - Provide an intensive challenge and support programme to secondary schools to ensure that the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ GCSE A*-C including mathematics and English is in the top 20% of the most improved authorities in the country by 2015;

ACS P066 Number of admissions of supported residents aged 65 or over to residential/nursing care per 10,000 population;

ACS P059 Overall attendance at Mill House, Brierton and Headland Leisure Centre's;

ACS P081 Number of patients completing a 10 week programme of referred activity recommended as a health intervention - GP referrals;

NI 123 Stopping smoking - rate of self-reported 4-week smoking quitters per 100,000 population aged 16 or over;

NI 193 Percentage of municipal waste (all waste collected by the local authority) land filled.

Decision

1. That the position in performance as at end of September 2015 (Quarter 2) be noted.
2. That the position in relation to use of RIPA powers as set out in section 4.7 of the report be noted.
3. That the Action identified as intervention required as set out in Table 1 of the report be noted.

4. That the Performance Indicators identified as intervention required, set out in Tables 2, 4 and 5 of the report be noted.
5. That the removal of performance indicator CAD P145 as set out in paragraph 5.6 of the report be approved.
6. That the change to risks as set out in sections 5.6 and 7.5 of the report be noted.
7. That the re-wording of action PHD 15/16 HW031 as set out in paragraph 6.4 of the report be approved.

135. Council Domestic Violence and Abuse Workforce Policy and Procedures (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods and Assistant Chief Executive*)

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

To consider for approval a proposed Council Domestic Violence and Abuse Workforce Policy and Procedure, and a proposal to recruit (on a voluntary basis) several 'Domestic Abuse Champions' from the existing workforce, to support the overall aims of the policy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that the Safer Hartlepool Partnership Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy introduced in 2013 aimed to reduce incidents of domestic violence in Hartlepool and its impact on those affected by it. The strategy aimed to do this through: early intervention and prevention; the provision of specialist services; partnership working; and improving criminal justice outcomes. Implementation of the Domestic Abuse strategy is assisted by an action plan, refreshed annually, and overseen by the local Domestic Violence Strategic Group.

In recognition of the fact that employers have a key role to play in addressing issues around domestic abuse and its impact, a key action in the current action plan is to develop and promote a domestic abuse workforce policy which aims to support employees who may be affected by the issue.

In light of the potential to improve responses to domestic abuse through workforce policies, the Domestic Violence Strategic Group, in conjunction with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), had developed a proposed Council Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy and Procedure which was submitted as an appendix to the report.

The Domestic Violence Strategic Group currently comprised of representatives from Children and Adult Services, Public Health, and Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Departments as well as organisations external to the Council such as the Hartlepool and Stockton North Tees Clinical Commissioning Group, the Police, Tees Esk and Wear Valley Foundation Trust, and Local Criminal Justice Board.

The Assistant Chief Executive highlighted that the key element of the policy was the appointment of Domestic Abuse Champions within the organisation who would act as a point of contact where domestic abuse issues were raised as a concern. In this respect it was proposed that Council staff (excluding schools), be invited to volunteer for the role, with the intention of having a mix of managers/staff, male/female personnel who were in roles where they are easily accessible to staff wishing to discuss any issues drawn from across the Council as follows:

Children and Adult Services – 1 champion
Public Health – 1 champion
Regeneration and Neighbourhoods – 2 champions (1 depot-based)
Chief Executives – 1 champion
Plus one other ‘floating’ member of staff (6 champions in total)

Domestic Abuse Champions would not be responsible for providing specialist support to victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse but would be trained to understand the impact of domestic abuse and would be armed with the requisite knowledge to ensure appropriate signposting to support services.

Members welcomed the proposal as being an important action for the Council as an employer. Members suggested that appropriate training on the policy should be made available to Councillors to provide as wide a possible understanding of the policy and the issue in general.

Decision

1. That the proposed Domestic Violence and Abuse Workforce Policy be approved, together with the proposal to recruit six Domestic Violence Champions from across the workforce to assist with implementation of the Policy.
2. That a Members seminar be held on the new policy.

136. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

There were no items the Chair considered urgent.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 11 January, 2016 commencing at 9.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The meeting concluded at 9.42 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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