

EMERGENCY PLANNING JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

24th February 2016

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm at the Emergency Planning Annex,
Stockton Police Station, Bishop Street, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1SY

Present:

Councillor: Marjorie James (Hartlepool Borough Council) (In the Chair)

Councillors: Mike Smith (Stockton Borough Council)

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 Councillor Julia Rostron
(Middlesbrough Borough Council) was in attendance as substitute for
Councillor Charles Rooney

Officers: Stuart Marshall, Chief Emergency Planning Officer
Jon Hepworth, Group Accountant (Regeneration and
Neighbourhoods)
Jo Stubbs, Democratic Services Officer

50. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted by Councillor Charles Rooney (Middlesbrough
Borough Council)

51. Declarations of interest by Members

None

52. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2015

The minutes were received

53. 2014/15 Annual Return and Audit Report (*Chief Finance Officer*)

Purpose of report

To enable Members to approve the Annual Return for 2014/15 and present

the external audit report by BDO LLP

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Group Accountant provided background information and made reference to the Audit Commission return, a copy of which was attached as an appendix to the report. The return included the Accounting Statements, Annual Governance Statement and Annual Internal Audit Report. Also appended was a document detailing issues arising from the audit and an action plan for said issues. Members were informed that in the future there would be no requirement for an audit to be carried out on the Cleveland Emergency Planning Joint Committee as they would be below the financial requirement. The committee was advised that the finances would be overseen as part of the wider Hartlepool Council arrangements.

Decision

That the Annual Return be approved, the 'Issues Arising' noted and the management responses to these be approved.

54. Financial Management Report – as at 30th September 2015 *(Chief Finance Officer and Chief Emergency Planning Officer)*

Purpose of Report

- a) To provide details of progress against the Joint Committee's overall revenue budget for 2015/2016
- b) To provide a medium term financial forecast for the 5 year period covering 2016/17 to 2020/2021
- c) To make recommendations for addressing the effect of annual 5% reductions in Local Authority contributions and a potential removal of Local Levy Fund income in 2017/18

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Group Accountant outlined the performance and progress of the Emergency Planning Unit (EPU) against the approved 2015/16 revenue budget up to end of September 2015. There was a forecast favourable variance of £43,000 on the main Emergency Planning budget mainly due to savings from an internal staffing restructure. It was proposed that this favourable variance be transferred to reserves to support future service delivery. A further unfavourable variance of £16,000 was identified in the main budget due to the accommodation move. Reserves had been released for this purpose. Longer term financial pressures on the Unit were expected to increase substantially from 2017/18 onward if contributions

from the 4 local authorities continue to decrease by 5% from March 2018. Local Levy Fund arrangements were also due to end in March 2017. As staffing accounted for 65% of the Unit's running costs the proposed 1% pay increase, 2016 National insurance increase and phased implementation of a National Living Wage would also have a significant impact and could result in a £73,000 deficit by 2020/2021. The Group Accountant queried whether, given these concerns, the committee would support writing to the Leaders of the 4 authorities regarding the continuation of the 5% annual reduction and associated risks.

Members discussed the possible impact budget pressures might have on the unit. The Chair felt there was a danger that the Unit could be absorbed into one of the emergency services or the 4 local authorities thereby losing its independence. The Chief Emergency Planning Officer identified that different models operate across the country and outlined a number of benefits of the current arrangements, including the ability to allocate a greater number of staff to a response, the development of areas of specialism and the benefits for partners of a single point of contact. By being independent the current arrangements ensure that Emergency Planning remains the core focus and does not become secondary to the parent service's objectives. The Chair felt stability of membership of the committee and regular attendance at meetings was important as the Unit needed a champion in each authority to ensure that the role and function was understood within each local authority against a background of budget reductions and changes at a local authority level. Members agreed that it was important that the Unit retain its independence particularly given the risk profile of the area including the high concentration of COMAH sites.

In terms of the Local Levy Fund arrangements the Chair advised that a request had been made to the local levy fund that this continue for a further 3 years following March 2017, however options were to be discussed at future RFCC meeting. It was hoped that this funding could be utilised to retain the Unit's dedicated resilience worker. The Chair also suggested that in the aftermath of incidents businesses and those benefitting from the role be asked to pay a financial contribution into the Unit to support future resilience work. This could lead to financial savings for the businesses affected, provide income to the Unit and potentially save lives.

Members also discussed issues around fires at waste sites and flooding.

Decision

That the following be approved:

- a) Use of £16,000 of reserves to fund the cost of the accommodation move and release £15,000 as part of the strategy to use up the Training and Exercising Group Reserve by March 2017

- b) Transferral of any underspend to reserves to support future service delivery
- c) Noting that the savings requirement target for 2016/17 had been achieved
- d) Reporting to the Leaders and Chief Executives of the 4 Councils during 2016/17 to recommend a longer term financial strategy for the Unit including the proposal to fix the annual contribution in cash terms from 2017/18
- e) The measures detailed for addressing the forecast deficit in the medium term.

55. Financial Management Report – as at 31st December 2015 *(Chief Finance Officer and Chief Emergency Planning Officer)*

Purpose of Report

To provide details of progress against the Joint Committee's overall revenue budget for 2015/2016

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Group Accountant outlined the performance and progress of the Emergency Planning Unit (EPU) against the approved 2015/16 revenue budget up to the end of 2015. There was a forecast favourable variance of £61,000 on the main Emergency Planning budget. This was a higher variance than was reported for the end of September mainly due to an additional staffing vacancy resulting in £16,000 less expenditure on salaries on the Local Levy Fund budget.

Decision

That the following be approved:

- a) Use of £16,000 of reserves to fund the cost of the accommodation move and release £15,000 as part of the strategy to use up the Training and Exercising Group Reserve by March 2017
- b) Transferral of any underspend to reserves to support future service delivery

56. CEPU Action Plan 2015/16 *(Chief Emergency Planning Officer)*

Purpose of Report

To provide members with an update on the progress of the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit against the 2015/16 action plan.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer provided an overview of progress made against the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit Action Plan set in May 2015. He was confident that all actions would be delivered and outlined a number of the actions delivered in this quarter. Details were also given of key themes which were being progressed alongside the action plan. The CEPO advised that a full detailed report of all actions would be brought to the next meeting.

Decision

That the report be noted.

57. Reported Incidents and Warnings Received *(Chief Emergency Planning Officer)*

Purpose of Report

To inform members of the incidents reported and warning communications received and dealt with by the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit between 19th November 2015 and 31st January 2016.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

Between 19th November 2015 and 31st January 2016 the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit received 5 weather warnings, 3 cold weather alerts, 10 flood alerts and 2 flood warnings. 7 notification blue alerts were issued but no red alerts. Details of 6 incidents of note were appended to the report.

The Chair identified that following discussion with the CEPO at the pre-agenda meeting a more comprehensive standard report could be produced for members. The committee was in support of developing this standard report.

Decision

That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 2pm

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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