

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

27 MARCH 2017

The meeting commenced at 10.05 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

Present:

Councillor Christopher Akers Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Allan Barclay, Paul Beck, Kevin Cranney, Tim Fleming, Marjorie James, Brenda Loynes, Stephen Thomas and Paul Thompson.

Also Present: Councillor Jim Lindridge as substitute for Councillor Alan Clark in accordance with Council Procedure rule 5.2.

Officers: Gill Alexander, Chief Executive
Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Director of Finance and Policy
Sally Robinson, Director of Child and Adult Services
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Andrew Carter, Assistant Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration
Katie Hammond, Projects Manager
Steve Hilton, Public Relations Officer
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

120. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Alan Clark.

121. Declarations of Interest

None.

122. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2017

Confirmed.

123. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 16 January 2017

Received.

124. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 20 January 2017

Received.

125. Proposals Regarding the Acquisition of Northern Lights Academy (NLA) *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

Key Decision test (i)/(ii) Forward Plan Reference No. CAS51/16.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to gain approval for Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) to take ownership of Northern Lights Academy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Child and Adult Services reported on the background to the building of the Northern Lights Academy (NLA) and the situation that had led to the Council agreeing to take a licence for NLA for the purposes of securing and maintaining the building from the Diocese of Durham while a solution was found for its future. The HBC licence began in September 2015 at which point the authority mothballed the building in order to reduce running costs and prevent further deterioration to the fabric of the building. The building currently remains mothballed. The licence had recently been renewed to run until 31st August 2017. The original funding responsibility for the project had also now transferred to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Cabinet Office.

Hartlepool primary and secondary schools and post-16 education providers have welcomed the opportunity to shape the curriculum pathways that would operate from NLA. These pathways would maximise the use of the high specification resources within the building, and also prepare more young people to enter employment sectors in the region and sub-region where a predicted shortfall in workforce skills is anticipated. Additionally, schools have agreed in principle to buy into the curriculum pathways to strengthen the curriculum offer for groups of students.

Officers were working with a lead educational partner to deliver the 14-19 pathways, including providing staff and expertise to deliver core elements of the curriculum for 14-16 year-olds initially, and then expanding the offer for post-16 students to compliment the town's current post-16 learning offer. It is anticipated that this offer would be in place from September 2017 and a further report outlining the business case would be presented to a joint meeting of the Finance and Policy and Children's Services Committees in May/June 2017.

A number of independent organisations had also expressed an interest in being a learning partner in the full programme offer at NLA, including in the fields of music, dance and wider performing arts. The next step in working with partners would be to secure formal partnership working agreements.

It was proposed that the Council acquire the Northern Lights Academy building, land and equipment on the terms set out in the Confidential Appendix to the report which 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, (para. 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). This would allow the building to be brought back into use by children and young people in Hartlepool.

The Director indicated that a further report, with an accompanying business case and business plan, would be brought to a joint meeting of Finance and Policy Committee and Children's Services Committee in May or June this year detailing the future use of NLA.

The report also set out details of some of the legal issues that would need to be addressed, particularly in relation to the original lease, for the Council to take control of the building.

Members welcomed the proposal as this was an excellent facility that was going unused and could provide significant opportunities for young people in the town. Members did indicate that much would depend on the business report being developed.

Decision

1. That the Council should conclude negotiations with the Diocese of Durham and the relevant government departments to take ownership of the Northern Lights Academy, including its assets, ensuring that there is no legacy liability from the original MyPlace project.
2. That a further report be submitted in May or June 2017 in relation to the future use of Northern Lights Academy as a centre of excellence in technical training for creative industries, accompanied by a fully developed business plan for the centre, to a joint meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee and the Children's Services Committee.

126. Vacant Posts Annual Report *(Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

For Information only.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report was to provide a list of vacant posts within the Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Finance and Policy reported that Members had requested an annual report on vacant posts within the Council. The position as at 3 February 2017 was set out in detail in an appendix to the report. In summary, there were 45 posts vacant across the Council as at 3 February 2017. These were broken down as follows:

Regeneration and Neighbourhoods	19 posts
Child and Adult Services	12 posts
Public Health	2 posts
Finance and Policy	10 posts
Chief Solicitors Division	2 posts

The Director of Finance and Policy highlighted that the figures related to the number of posts, some fifteen of which were not full time posts. The number of full time equivalents would, therefore, be lower. It was also highlighted that the Council did not budget for a full 100% staff establishment and consequently vacant posts were managed throughout the year to deliver the required budget saving.

The Corporate Management Team actively managed vacant posts on an ongoing basis to ensure the Council had the appropriate resources and skills to effectively deliver services, alongside considerations in respect of the ongoing financial and budgetary challenges the Council faces.

Where necessary, vacant posts were retained to avoid compulsory redundancies and contribute to budget reductions which had proven to be a highly effective strategy over a number of years. There were ten posts identified in Appendix 1 which were being held for 2017/18 savings.

The Chair suggested that the report next year should be scheduled after 31 March to allow for the posts that were to be written out of the establishment for budget savings could be accounted for before the underlying position was reported.

Decision

That the report be noted and that in future years reports be submitted to the Committee after the end of the financial year.

127. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chairman ruled that the following items of business should be

considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

128. Land at Hart (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Non key decision.

Purpose of report

To seek approval for letting of farm land at Hart.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration reported that land at Hart Smallholdings extending to approximately 150 acres had been let for many years. Upon the death in 2015 of the previous tenant the tenancy passed to family members who surrendered it in the spring of 2016. The majority of the land had now been marketed on an informal tender basis to let as farm land in two lots of 29 acres and 119 acres. The offer attracted a high level of interest. The land was shown on the plan submitted as an appendix to the report.

The ten tenders received by the closing date of Friday 17th March 12 noon are summarised on the attached table. The majority of the tenders were from well established local farmers. It was proposed to grant a new farm business tenancy of the land to the successful tenderer as set out in the Confidential Appendix to the report which contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, (paragraph 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The highest tenderer proposed to install locked gates to entrances and to secure gaps in the fences and hedges to prevent unauthorised access. He has also indicated that he would be interested in taking the land for a longer term than the six years proposed in the marketing details. This may be to the authority's advantage as it would provide greater certainty of income and reduce management costs. The tenancy would be subject to rent reviews. If in the future part of the land could be developed, possession could be obtained subject to the service of one year's notice.

Decision

That approval be given to the grant of the new tenancy as set out in the Confidential Appendix to the report which contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local

Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, (paragraph 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The meeting concluded at 10.15 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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