

CABINET

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

25th September 2006

Present:

The Mayor (Stuart Drummond) - In the Chair

Councillors: Cath Hill (Deputy Mayor),

Robbie Payne (Finance Portfolio Holder),

Peter Jackson (Performance Management Portfolio Holder),

Victor Tumilty (Culture, Leisure and Transportation Portfolio Holder),

Ray Waller (Adult and Public Health Services Portfolio Holder).

Also Present

Councillor Gerard Hall, Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum

Officers:

Paul Walker Chief Executive

Andrew Atkin, Assistant Chief Executive

Peter Scott, Director of Regeneration and Planning Services

Adrienne Simcock, Director Children's Services

Dave Stubbs, Director of Neighbourhood Services

Joanne Machers, Chief Personnel Services Officer

Mike Ward, Chief Financial Officer

Alan Dobby, Assistant Director, Adult and Community Services Department

Paul Briggs, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services

Geoff Thompson, Head of Regeneration

Steve Hilton, Assistant Public Relations Officer

Angela Hunter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

66. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pamela Hargreaves.

67. Declarations of interest by Members

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

68. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2006

Confirmed.

69. Preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document and The Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (*Director of Regeneration and Planning Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To advise members that preliminary work has commenced on the preparation of the Core Strategy of the Hartlepool Local Development Framework (LDF) and also the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

It was reported that work had commenced on the above two documents under the new planning system introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. An outline of the information to be reflected within the documents was included within the report. The timetable for the preparation of the documents was set out in the Local Development Scheme recently approved by Cabinet and by the Secretary of State.

Decision

The report was noted.

70. Strengthening Communities Best Value Review – Strategic Improvement Plan (*Director of Regeneration and Planning Services*)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (ii) applies.

Purpose of report

To consider and agree the Strategic Improvement Plan for the Strengthening Communities Best Value Review. A draft of the Improvement Plan was considered by Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 4th August 2006 and has subsequently been amended to take on board scrutiny comments and those of Officers from other Council Departments.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Review had been used to clarify the Council's responsibilities and what actions were needed to improve performance in the Strengthening Communities aspect of the Council's work. The Best Value Review Final Report was attached by way of Appendix. The aim and objectives of the Strengthening Communities theme were detailed within the report. There were some concerns and weaknesses highlighted within the main findings of the report. The report suggested that the findings of the Strengthening Communities BVR be used as the starting point for the development and re-launch of a re-negotiated Compact with the Community Voluntary Sector.

It was noted that this report had been well received by Scrutiny and Members wished to see the development and re-launch of a Compact within the Community Voluntary Sector implemented soon. The Head of Regeneration informed Members that the Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency had also been complimentary about the report. There was some concern that the Government's White Paper examining the reconfiguration of the way local partnerships were formed would affect how this development was undertaken. The Head of Regeneration indicated that one of the numerous action points contained within the Improvement Plan addressed the particular issue of the Local Government White Paper and the need to monitor developments in parallel with the Compact Review process.

Decision

- i) The Strengthening Communities Strategic Improvement Plan, and in particular the proposed actions contained within the Improvement Plan Schedule at Section 3 were approved.
- ii) The findings of the Strengthening Communities Best Value Review and associated documentation, including Annexe 1 to the Improvement Plan Schedule were noted and would be used as the starting point for the development and re-launch of a re-negotiated Compact with the Community Voluntary Sector.

71. Final Report – Public Convenience Provision in Hartlepool (*Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To present the findings of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum in relation to the Public Convenience Provision Scrutiny Referral.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum summarised the content of the Forum's report relating to the outcome of the Forum's investigation into public convenience provision in Hartlepool. Outlined within the report were details of the background to the inquiry, its overall aim, terms of reference, methods of investigation and findings. Details were also provided of the conclusions reached and approval sought of the Forum's recommendations.

Members indicated that this had been a thorough and detailed investigation which resulted in a number of recommendations to address the issues raised. Whilst Members of Cabinet were in support of the majority of the Forum's recommendations a further report a number of issues were highlighted which it was felt needed to be explored further. These issues were as follows:-

- i) Opening times. Concern was expressed regarding the opening times of public conveniences across the town and the fact that some facilities were closing as early as 3.15pm. Members were of the view that in tourist areas conveniences needed to be open at appropriate times. Particular attention was drawn to the need for facilities on the Headland to be open.
- ii) The Clock Tower. Concern was expressed regarding longer term proposals for the closure of facilities at the Clock Tower particularly in light of the possibility of efforts being made to secure funding to bring the whole building up to standard.
- iii) Upper Burn Valley facilities. It was suggested that the reopening of the facility in the Upper Burn Valley site for the use of the Allotment Association be looked into.

- iv) Old Seaton Bath's site. Concern was expressed regarding the implications of the closure of facilities in terms of public health and the distance between public conveniences along the Coastal Arch. It was suggested that the public convenience at the old Seaton Baths site should be open all year round. Concern was also expressed regarding the feasibility of an arrangement with the owners of the new bistro on the adjacent site for use of their toilets by the public.

During the course of discussions the Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum agreed that the provision of facilities required further examination, especially in light of the forthcoming Tall Ships Event to be held in the town in 2010. It was also highlighted that whilst there was a facility within the Maritime Experience, the Forum as part of its investigation had identified that need for better signage in order that full use could be made of this. The need for better signage in fact applied across the town.

In considering the recommendations contained within the Forums report, and the issues outlined above, it was suggested that a further report be presented to Cabinet outlining the financial implications/detail of the proposals and the possible overall financial package for their implementation. On this basis, the Director of Neighbourhood Services agreed to submit a further report to Cabinet. Following consideration of this report the details of the actions to be taken in respect of each of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forums recommendations would then be presented to the Forum by the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Liveability and Housing and the Director of Neighbourhood Services.

Decision

That the Director of Neighbourhood Services present a further report to Cabinet outlining:-

- i) The financial implications of each of the proposals contained within the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum report and the additional suggestions made by Cabinet members, as outlined above.
- ii) The overall financial package required for the implementation of the Forums recommendations, including the additional suggestions made by Cabinet.

72. Joint Allocations Policy Review (*Director of Neighbourhood Services*)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (ii) applies.

Purpose of report

To recommend amendments to the Joint Allocations Policy following a thorough review of the policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and complies with all legislative requirements, in particular the introduction of Choice Based Lettings before the Governments target of 2010.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The above review was agreed through the Housing Agency Agreement concerning the transfer of Council housing to Housing Hartlepool. The detailed findings of the review and recommendations regarding access to accommodation for vulnerable groups along with clearer guideline for applicants and practitioners were included within the report.

There were several amendments proposed in response to the operation of the local market for social housing detailed within the report. Several key sections of the policy were focussed on with regard to delivering the homelessness strategy and acknowledging developing local needs and the resulting proposed amendments to the policy were included within the report.

Members had several areas of concern including the fact that there had been no Member representation on the Consultation Panel and that previously, criminal records bureau checks were carried out by the Council but now the Police were relied upon to provide this information. Members also wished to have further information regarding the co-opted approach with Housing Hartlepool.

Decision

- (i) It was agreed to defer the approval of the amendments to the JAP pending a detailed presentation to Members.
- (ii) A joint seminar with Members and partner agencies be held to consider the future introduction of Choice Based Lettings and the possible future provision of a Housing Options Centre.

73. A Review of Hartlepool Council's Housing Functions

(Director of Regeneration and Planning Services, Director of Neighbourhood Services and Director of Adult and Community Services)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to consider strengthening the housing functions, which are the responsibility of the Borough Council. The objective is to provide a fit for purpose housing function that will properly meet the needs of the residents of the Borough and to raise the performance of housing services in a changing housing environment by improving management arrangements, its capacity, its integration and linkage with other services and its profile within the Council.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report detailed the background to the review along with the current housing service arrangements. The principal triggers for the review of the “Retained Housing Service” within Neighbourhood Services were in particular the weaknesses identified in the service and also the changing context for housing services nationally. The report recommended ways of strengthening the management and capacity of the housing service and its structure and then options for positioning the housing service within the overall departmental structure of the Council. It aimed to make best use of existing experience and expertise within the Council and takes into account the views of managers in housing services.

There were two location options within the Council's departmental structure for the Housing Service detailed in the report along with the advantages and disadvantages for each option. The Director of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that the financial pressures were identical for each option.

Members discussed both options and were pleased to see that experience and expertise of existing members of staff would be utilised.

Decision

- (i) The report was agreed.
- (ii) Option B was agreed as the preferred option.
- (iii) The implementation of a Head of Housing post and the immediate repositioning of the service was agreed.
- (iv) The pressures identified for strengthening the service, currently being considered in the budget review were noted.

74. Building Schools for the Future : Stage One Consultation (*Director of Children's Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To seek approval to launch a first stage of consultation in preparation for the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme and to seek approval in principle to the outline of a Stage One Consultation Document.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report detailed the background to the preparation of the BSF programme along with the proposed first stage of consultation. The aim of the consultation was to share information with as wide an audience as possible and collect their views on possible ways forward. Further consultation would be undertaken, depending on the outcome of the first round.

Members felt that this was a huge development for Hartlepool and the future of the schools. It was hoped that sufficient publicity be undertaken in order to promote the consultation meetings to enable as many people as possible to input their views to this consultation.

Members were concerned that there did not appear to be any consultation meetings proposed for the central or Seaton areas of the town. The Director of Children's Services indicated that although the timescale for this consultation was tight, extra consultation meetings could be arranged if Members felt this was appropriate.

Decision

- (i) The launch of the first stage of consultation in preparation for Building Schools for the Future was approved.
- (ii) The outline of the Stage One Consultation Document was approved in principle.
- (iii) The final approval of the Stage One Consultation Document was delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

75. Development of a Children's Trust in Hartlepool (*Director of Children's Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To consider possible models for the development of a Children's Trust in Hartlepool from 1st April 2007.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report detailed the background to the possible establishment of a Children's Trust in Hartlepool and the government's requirements in relation to its membership and operation. A Children's Trust needed to be established by 2008. This had to consist of a set of effective local arrangements including a child centred outcome-led vision, integrated front line delivery, integrated process, integrated strategy and inter-agency governance. The Director of Children's Services advised Members that this report outlined the statutory guidance in relation to establishing a Children's Trust and that a further detailed report would be submitted to Cabinet at a later date providing suggested membership, roles and remit for a Children's Trust.

The report suggested two main options for the development of a Children's Trust and they were:

Option A – Partnership Model **Option B – A “Hard” Trust**

The Director of Children's Services advised Members that if Option A was chosen as the preferred option, this could be amended to incorporate the hard legal Trust model at a later date if this was felt necessary.

Members requested that the further detailed report to be submitted to Cabinet include the cost implications and the information identifying the difference between delegating and pooling of budgets.

Decision

- (i) That a partnership model of Children's Trust (Option A) be established to enable a Children's Trust to be developed quickly in order to build on existing good practice.
- (ii) A further detailed report be submitted to Cabinet determining the roles, remit and membership of the Children's Trust, in parallel with the review of the Local Strategic Partnership Structure as well as the cost implications and information identifying the difference between delegating and pooling of budgets.

76. Local Government Access to Information

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs detailed below in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 79 – Salary Deductions for Industrial Action (Para 4 – namely, Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.)

77. Declarations of Interest

The Mayor Stuart Drummond, Councillors Ray Waller and Robbie Payne declared a prejudicial interest and left the meeting.

78. Inquorate Meeting

It was noted that the meeting was not quorate. The Deputy Mayor indicated that (as permitted under the Local Government Act 2000 and the Constitution) she would exercise her powers of decision and that she would do so in accordance with the wishes of the Members present, indicated in the usual way. Each of the decisions set out in the decision record were confirmed by the Deputy Mayor accordingly.

79. Salary Deductions for Industrial Action *(Chief Personnel Services Officer)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To seek a decision on a request from the Hartlepool Joint Trade Union Committee (HJTUC) to agree the salary deduction rate for employees who took part in industrial action on 28 March 2006 and any further action which may take in the future.

Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet

The report set out the background to the most recent industrial action, details of a request from the Hartlepool Joint Trade Union Committee, the recommendation of the Local Joint Consultative Committee and key issues for Cabinet to consider.

Decision

The decision is set out in the confidential section of these minutes.

J A BROWN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 29th September 2006