

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

12 MARCH 2018

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

Present:

Councillor Christopher Akers Belcher (In the Chair)

Correction: - Councillors: Alan Clark, Kevin Cranney, Tim Fleming, Dave Hunter, Marjorie James, Jim Lindridge, Brenda Loynes, Shane Moore, Stephen Thomas and Paul Thompson.

Councillor Leisa Smith in attendance, not Paul Thompson.

Officers: Gill Alexander, Chief Executive
Hayley Martin, Head of Legal Services (Place)
John Morton, Assistant Director, Finance and Customer Services
Claire McLaren, Assistant Director, Corporate Services
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Steve Hilton, Public Relations Officer
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

111. Apologies for Absence

None.

112. Declarations of Interest

None.

113. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2018

Confirmed.

114. Minutes of the meeting of the Joint meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee and the Regeneration Services Committee held on 22 January 2018

Confirmed.

115. Minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 8 December 2017

Received.

116. Neighbourhood Investment Programme (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Key Decision, Tests (i) and (ii) apply.

Purpose of report

To provide an update on the capital investment programme that will deliver improvements to neighbourhoods across Hartlepool.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that in March 2017, the Committee considered a programme of capital investment to deliver improvements to neighbourhoods across the town. Schemes were submitted by ward members against agreed criteria and a number of schemes were agreed. The prioritised short term schemes agreed by committee were –

- i. Shopping Parades; King Oswy Drive
- ii. Rossmere Park
- iii. Stranton Cemetery
- iv. Playspace on Coronation Drive

Three further medium term schemes were also approved –

- i. The Headland; prevent deterioration on previous regeneration schemes
- ii. Barrier works between Tesco Roundabout and Middleton Road
- iii. Roundabouts at Key Gateway Points

Since the Programme was agreed, it has been proposed to include an additional scheme that will improve the footpaths around the BIS, Whitby Street.

A document had been produced outlining the details available on each scheme that has been brought forward. It provided the current timetable for the works and costs, alongside location plans and photographs of the sites. A copy of the document was submitted as an appendix to the report. Following the initial report, officers had opportunity to further refine the cost estimates and consider what other opportunities for funding were available. Details of the costs for the short-term schemes were as follows (Table 1): -

Scheme	Budget Originally Approved by F&P 27.3.17 £'000	Latest Cost Estimate/ Funding Required £'000	Proposed Budget Amendment £'000	Comments
Rossmere Park	160	0	(160)	External Funding opportunities are being sought and it is anticipated that this scheme will be fully funded from Landfill Tax grant.
Stranton Cemetery	115	45	(70)	An alternative scheme has been devised to deliver the reduction in traffic through the cemetery.
Playspace on Coronation Drive	70	70	0	
King Oswy Drive	0	290	290	A scheme of works has now been devised and costed.
Pavement area around the BIS	0	105	105	This is a new scheme.
Total	345	510	165	

It was considered that the proposed works for Rossmere Park could be eligible for grant assistance from the Land Fill Tax Programme administered by Mondegreen EB Ltd and an application had been submitted. An alternative solution had been found for the works in Stranton Cemetery with existing gates utilised enabling the number of barriers and bollards required to be rationalised. As a result the costs estimate for the works had reduced from £115,000 to £45,000, although the objective of preventing traffic using the Cemetery as a short cut would still be achieved.

The spending proposed in this phase of schemes was £510,000 which exceeded the previously agreed sum of £345,000 by £165,000. The increase was because costs were now available for works at King Oswy Shops, where previously these hadn't been priced; and a further project, paving around the BIS, had now been included.

Details of the costs for the medium-term schemes were as follows (Table 2): -

Scheme	Latest Cost Estimate/ Funding Required £'000	Comments
Barrier works to main routes into town	400	These works will complement the Stockton Street works.
Features on roundabouts to create gateways	200	Two gateway features will be created.
Headland Regeneration Works	77	Works to repair Town Square and Union Street Railings, and to provide permanent access to the Cenotaph on the Headland
Total	677	

Additional requests have recently been received from Members to include the following in the Neighbourhood Investment Programme:

- The installation of additional and replacement seating benches along the promenade in Seaton;
- The provision of a disabled access wheelchair for Seaton beach;
- The purchase and installation of 7 Belly Bins for the Headland;
- The provision of a play space at the Headland to replace the one that has been recently removed due to vandalism; and
- Improvements to Jutland Road Community Centre.

At present, these works have not been quoted for inclusion.

It was estimated that the total cost of the second phase of works would be £677,000.

The total costs of the works for both phases was £1,187,000, leaving a balance of £313,000, subject to Members not requesting that any of the above projects are added to the programme. The Director proposed that this balance was held until there was confirmation that external funding could be obtained to deliver the works in Rossmere Park. Should it become apparent that there is a need to direct the remaining funding to Rossmere Park or consider alternative schemes; a further report would be brought back to this committee to agree the proposed works.

The Director also highlighted to the Committee that the project would also benefit from £250,000 of investment from Thirteen Group, although Thirteen were currently identifying their priorities with this fund and how the remaining amount could support our programme of neighbourhood investment. It was proposed that the remaining Thirteen Group allocation was pooled together with any suitable Section 106 funding, and that a further report was brought back to Committee to identify additional schemes that this money can support.

The Director also proposed that an annual ward member update be produced that would detail the work that had been undertaken by the Council and would be specific to their ward to ensure Members are kept informed. It was intended that this update be provided in the Members' Library, though during the debate it was suggested that an e-mail update also be provided.

In relation to the works proposed at Stranton Cemetery a Member suggested that the flooding issues in the cemetery were in need of more urgent rectification than the traffic issues. The Chair stated that the proposals to stop the through traffic in the cemetery would result in the only visitor vehicle entrance being that on Brierton Lane. Pedestrian access would be maintained at Tanfield Road but that access for vehicles would only be opened to allow funeral corteges to enter and leave the site. The Chair did acknowledge the issues with flooding though considered them a

separate issue to the proposals set out in the report. With the agreement of the Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Committee, the Chair proposed a joint meeting to receive fully costed proposals for dealing with the flooding issues in Stranton Cemetery.

There was debate around the proposal to replace equipment at the Headland play area. A Member commented that as this was now only going to be the tower and slide, the funding for this would be substantially less than the £70,000 allocated, and the Member requested that any underspend be utilised to provide a junior play area. During the debate the Director commented that this would need to be costed. Members did feel that any new proposals need to be considered against other schemes before any works could be approved. The Member, therefore, formally proposed the Headland junior play area for consideration and also the works to floor of the Headland paddling pool which the Member had previously raised to be considered as part of the works on the sea defence improvements.

Members were assured that the scheme for the replacement of railing adjacent to the A689 as part of the Church Square / Stockton Road regeneration scheme would not pose a health and safety risk and would not be readily climbable by children. The Committee considered that a wider audit of barriers around the town was required as many that were due to be replaced were likely to be now unnecessary and could be removed.

In relation to the works at Seaton Carew a member indicated that the public had requested some covered seating as part of the proposals. Issues around the locations and types of bins along the front had also been raised. The Chair commented that the seating proposals currently agreed should continue so they were in place for the summer. Covered seating could be considered as part of a future scheme. In relation to the location of bins the Chair requested officers consult with the Seaton Ward councillor on their placement.

The Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Committee requested that the issue of the installation of additional 'big belly' bins in other areas, notably the Headland, should be deferred and referred back to the Neighbourhood Services Committee for further consideration to allow a review of the same bins currently in place in Seaton Carew.

Decision

In accordance with the authority delegated by Council within the approved MTFS for 2017/18 -

1. The Committee approved the proposals detailed in Tables 1 and 2 above;
2. The Committee noted that decision 1 above will commit £1.187m of the £1.5m funding available.
3. The Committee agreed that the balance of the fund, £313,000, be held

until it was confirmed that the proposed works at Rossmere Park could be funded through grant assistance. Should this funding become available Members would be consulted on additional schemes for delivery in future years.

4. The Committee requested that a further report be submitted on proposals for the allocation of the Section 106 funding and Thirteen Group investment.
5. That an annual ward member information sheet that details the work carried out by the Council in each ward be produced.
6. That a joint meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee and the Neighbourhood Services Committee be held to consider a report on the flooding issues at Stranton Cemetery including costed solutions.
7. That any underspend on the proposals to replace the tower and slide at the Headland play area be ring-fenced and returned to the programme budget.
8. That the further installation of 'belly bins' not be progressed until a review had been undertaken by the Neighbourhood Services Committee of their installation in Seaton Carew.
9. That the installation of additional and replacement seating benches along the promenade in Seaton and the provision of a disabled access wheelchair for Seaton beach be progressed should there be sufficient under-spend available from the Seaton Carew Regeneration Scheme.
10. That, subject to future funding availability, the following schemes be considered for future programme funding –
 - The floor of the Headland Paddling Pool;
 - The Headland junior play area;
 - Covered public seating and disabled access at Seaton Carew.

117. Proposal to Commit Funding from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve (*Children's Services Committee*)

Type of decision

Non-Key Decision.

Purpose of report

To enable Finance and Policy Committee to consider the recommendations from Children's Services Committee (20 February 2018) regarding proposed usage of the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Finance and Customer Services reported that the Children's Services Committee on 20 February 2018 considered a Report from the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning; "Proposal to Extend the Children's 5 – 19 Activities Grant by a Further 6 Months and 'Poverty Proofing the School Day'". A copy of the Report was submitted as an appendix to the report.

The report identified proposals to extend the Children's 5 – 19 activities grant by a further 6 months to ensure funding is in place for the whole of the 2018/19 financial year and to support schools with the cost of research into 'poverty proofing' the school day. The proposal was to fund the total costs of these from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve.

Children's Services Committee approved both proposals however only Finance and Policy Committee have delegated authority to approve funding from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve. Children's Services Committee, therefore, referred their proposals to Finance and Policy Committee for final approval. If the above proposals were approved this would leave an uncommitted balance of £94,500 in the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve.

The Chair of the Children's Services Committee spoke in support of the proposals and indicated that in relation to the poverty proofing proposals a number of schools in the north of the town would be pilot of the scheme, should this prove successful then it could be rolled out across the whole town. In relation to the proposal to commit up to £10,000 (consisting of the £3,500 underspend from the Christmas 2017 'Filling the Holiday Gap' scheme and £6,500 from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve) towards a similar scheme during the Easter 2018 holiday period, the Chair of the Children's Services Committee suggested that the limit of up to £500 per organisation being made available, should be lifted.

The Chair supported the proposals and the lifting of the £500 limit. The Chair indicated that the impact of the poverty proofing scheme needed to be fully evidence based to ensure resources were targeted. A Member commented that some of the statistical information around super output areas should be utilised in targeting the scheme.

Decision

1. That the report be noted and the proposal to extend the activities 5 -19 grant by a further 6 months at a cost of £64,000 funded from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve be approved.
2. That the proposal to engage with Children North East to undertake work with a cohort of Hartlepool schools to 'poverty proof' their school day at a cost of £15,000 funded from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve, be approved.
3. That the proposal to commit up to £10,000 (consisting of the £3,500 underspend from the Christmas 2017 'Filling the Holiday Gap' scheme and £6,500 from the Child and Family Poverty Initiatives Reserve) towards a similar scheme during the Easter 2018 holiday period be approved.
4. That approval of grants from the Easter 'Filling the Holiday Gap' be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairs of the Finance and Policy Committee and the Children's Services Committee.

118. Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce (*Assistant Director, Corporate Services*)

Type of decision

Non-Key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to present Finance and Policy Committee with information on past and current initiatives that support the health and wellbeing of the workforce. The report also included an action plan for 2018/19.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services reported that following consideration of a Sickness Monitoring report by the Committee, members requested a subsequent report on the action taken within the Council to support the health and wellbeing of the workforce. Subsequently, a task and finish group was established with departmental representatives, chaired by the Assistant Director, Corporate Services.

The group had produced a document (submitted as an appendix to the report) detailing progress in supporting employee health and wellbeing over the period 2010 to 2017. The document also proposed a number of actions for 2018/19. Members were requested to consider approval of the action plan in order that further progress can be made in the health and wellbeing of the HBC workforce. The action plan detailed in Appendix A to the report would contribute to the Hartlepool Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority of 'Working Well'.

A member commented that small changes were well received by staff such as the break out space recently introduced in Bevan House. Another Member sought details of how many requests for flexible working had been made and how many had been approved by managers. The Assistant Director indicated details would be circulated to Members.

Decision

That the action plan set out in the appendix to the report be approved for implementation.

119. Working Towards Being a Dementia Friendly Organisation (*Assistant Director, Corporate Services*)

Type of decision

Non-Key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report was to support the Council to work towards being a Dementia Friendly Organisation.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services reported that Hartlepool and the Council had a long history of supporting dementia friendly policies, practices and initiatives. As a pivotal lead in the creation of the Dementia Friendly Hartlepool (DFH) project, a multi-agency project that aimed to develop Hartlepool as a regionally recognised dementia friendly community, HBC continued to serve and support as a full and active member of this project.

A number of staff within the Council were dementia friends and several teams have submitted pledges regarding their support and individual actions. Although a great deal of work is undertaken across individual Council Departments, there are no specific corporate actions that commit the organisation as a whole to work towards being a Dementia Friendly Organisation.

The proposed actions set out within the report would fit strategically with the 'Aging Well' objectives of the Hartlepool Health and Wellbeing Strategy and also the support to people living with dementia that is championed and led by the Adult Services Committee.

The Chief Executive commented that at a recent event involving business leaders the Dementia Friendly Hartlepool project was seen as a positive in raising the profile of Hartlepool as a great place to live. The objectives would provide a consistent approach across the organisation.

The Chair of the Adult Services Committee commented that the proposals would build on the work that had already been undertaken over the past five years and would give added direction. It was essential that all the Council's means of contact with the public were as dementia friendly as possible and the dementia friendly approach was embedded within the organisation. As many staff as possible should undergo the dementia champion training to cascade the knowledge throughout organisation. Members supported the proposals set out in the report.

Decision

That the six point action plan set out in the report be approved in order to demonstrate a commitment to working towards being a Dementia Friendly Organisation at a corporate level.

120. Council Plan 2017 – 2020 - Quarter 3 Performance Report (*Chief Executive*)

Type of decision

Non Key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to update Members on the progress made against the Council Plan 2017-2020 at the end of quarter 3 2017/18 and to seek Members approval to a number of changes/updates to the plan.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services reported on progress at the end of quarter 3 2017/18 and the key achievements made during the quarter as set out by the strategic priority infographic. The Assistant Director indicated that of the milestones that were currently in progress, 40 had missed or would miss their due dates which represented 17.5% of all of the milestones in the plan. At quarter 3 it was not unexpected that there were a number of milestones that were off target and this was in the main, due to overly ambitious and unrealistic deadlines being set. It was highlighted that the 40 missed milestones were contained within 23 key deliverables with a number of key deliverables having multiple missed milestones.

Over the next few months further work will be undertaken through the annual refresh process to review the Council Plan and ensure that the due dates for milestones over the next 2 years of the plan are realistic and deliverable. Within the quarter 3 update, the Assistant Director sought approval to the cancellation of three milestones.

The Chair of the Regeneration Services Committee indicated that the milestones on relation to the delivery of the BIS had been proposed to be changed from July to September 2018. The Chair requested that officers liaise with the Chair of the Regeneration Services Committee on amending the delivery dates recorded.

A member of the public questioned the deletion of the milestone CP 17/18 KD30-02 – Collaborate with Tees Valley Local Authorities on establishment of a free special school – and questioned where it was to be located and what the school was for. The Chief Executive stated that the five Tees Valley authorities had been examining the development of a specialist school to meet the needs of young people with very complex needs and disabilities that currently had to be educated outside the region, sometimes at significant costs both in terms of the education provided and transport. Under current DfEE rules the only way to open a new school was under the Free School regulations, however, the initial proposal had been rejected and officers were looking at the feasibility of a further bid.

The member of the public asked if these young people could not be educated at the Pupil Referral Unit in the town. The Chief Executive stated that the PRU was for those pupils who had been or were at risk of being permanently excluded from mainstream education and could not accommodate the needs of the children that the free school proposal was aimed at. The member of the public questioned if any particular school in the town had excluded more pupils than others. The Chair stated that the Children's Services Committee would be the most appropriate forum for a response.

Decision

1. That the overall progress made on the Council Plan 2017-20 at the end of Quarter 3 2017/18 as reported and the key achievements as set out in the infographic on page 1 of Appendix 1 of the report be noted;
2. That the information provided on the 40 milestones that had missed or would miss their due dates, the proposed date changes and the proposed removal of 3 milestones as reported be agreed;
3. That the information provided on the 5 performance indicators that had been identified as areas for improvement be noted.

121. Irrecoverable Debts – Council Tax and Business Rates *(Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

Non Key Decision.

Purpose of report

To seek Members approval to write-out a number of Council Tax and Business Rates debts which are now considered irrecoverable.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Finance and Customer Services reported on a series of Council Tax and Business Rates that were now considered irrecoverable. Appendices to the report detailed the individual Council Tax and Business Rates debts over £1000, and the reasons why each debt remained unrecovered. The amounts recommended for write out were the net debt outstanding and the net amounts involved often spanned more than one financial year. The total amount for write out were as follows:

Council Tax £35,197.87

Appendix A – Council Tax Deceased Debts- £11,289.38

Appendix B – Council Tax Absconder Debts - £3,203.55

Appendix C – Council Tax Bankrupt / Debt Relief Order Debts - £12,215.82.

Appendix D – Council Tax Miscellaneous- £8,489.12

Appendices A, B, C and D contained exempt information under Schedule 12A 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)

Business Rates £135,835.55

Appendix E – Business Rates Sole Trader Bankrupt / Debt Relief Order - £10,410.19.

Appendix F – Business Rates Sole Trader Absconder - £8,690.99

Appendix G – Business Rates Limited Company Liquidation / Dissolved - £116,734.37.

Appendices E and F contained exempt information under Schedule 12A 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).

All debts submitted for write-out from the accounting records had been comprehensively scrutinised by officers. In terms of the annual Council Tax and Business Rates debit to be collected, the amount proposed for write out continued to be very low. Across the 12 North East Councils in 2016/17 Hartlepool wrote out the lowest amount of Council Tax and ranked 9th out of 12 in the amount of Business Rates written out. This position reflected the Council's good long term collection rates and sustained robust recovery procedures. The proposed write out's were well within the financial planning assumptions underpinning the Council's budget.

Members questioned the expected level of recovery within the current financial year. The Assistant Director stated that the authority was on target to recover 98% of business rates as projected. The ability for council tax payers and businesses to agree payment plans to clear outstanding debts or meet their current bills was discussed with the Assistant Director confirming that payment plans down to weekly payments could be agreed.

Members were concerned at the use of court orders in debt recovery and the charges that were added to outstanding debts. The Assistant Director commented that court orders allowed the council to use enforcement agents where necessary and to agree payment plans. Debtors had the chance to attend court when these orders were considered. The orders also allowed officers to undertake checks that could allow for attachment to salary orders and reductions in benefits in conjunction with the DWP.

The Chair confirmed that officers did examine every possibility at recovering debts through agreements with debtors before court orders were pursued. All options were offered and the level of debts could have been higher had the council not maintained its Council Tax support scheme. The Chair

wished to record Members thanks to the officers involved in income recovery.

Decision

That the write-out of irrecoverable Council Tax of £35,197.87 and Business Rates debts to the value of £135,835.55 be approved and it was noted that £73,882.90 (54%) of the Business Rates write outs were the responsibility of Central Government.

122. Approval for Compulsory Redundancies *(Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

Non-Key Decision.

Purpose of report

To seek a decision regarding the future employment of employees who were affected by departmental restructures and budget proposals for 2018/19. Employees affected by this decision are identified on the schedule circulated at the meeting.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services, reported at the meeting that the numbers of staff now subject to compulsory redundancy had been reduced to 3 from the initial 7 suggested in the circulated report due to 4 now on trial for redeployment positions; 3 for permanent positions and 1 for employment continuing to September 2018. While the formal redundancies were requested for approval, efforts would continue on seeking redeployment for the individuals affected. The Appendix circulated at the meeting contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order 2006) namely (Para 1) information relating to an individual and (Para 3) information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person, including the authority holding that information.

In relation to the monitoring of the redeployment trials the Chair stated that as in previous years, the decision on whether the trials were considered to be successful or not should be referred back to the Chief Executive for decision in consultation with the Chair. The Assistant Director stated that she was optimistic that the redeployments agreed would be successful.

The Chair wished to record his thanks for the work of the HR team in reducing the numbers of compulsory redundancies as now reported.

Decision

1. That the compulsory redundancy of those staff identified in Appendix A tabled at the meeting be confirmed.
2. The Committee noted that during individual notice periods employees would be on the Redeployment Register and the Council would continue to seek alternative employment under the Compulsory Redundancy Redeployment Procedure.

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

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide a list of vacant posts within the Council as at 31 January 2018.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services submitted for the Committee's information details of the vacant posts within the authority as at 31 January 2018. The appendix to the report showed there were 76 vacant posts at various grades across the authority and whether a post was to be deleted as part of the 2018/19 savings programme. The Assistant Director also indicated that work had been undertaken with the Trade Unions to ensure that vacancies were not being held too long and were recruited to where necessary. Members sought details of the numbers of enforcement officers currently employed and being recruited and the Assistant Director undertook to circulate this information to Members.

Decision

That the report be noted.

124. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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