

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

8 OCTOBER 2018

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

Present:

Councillor Christopher Akers Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Stephen Akers-Belcher, Paddy Brown, Tom Cassidy, Brenda Harrison, Ann Marshall, Shane Moore and Stephen Thomas.

Also Present: Councillor Sue Little as substitute for Councillor Leisa Smith in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

Councillors Lesley Hamilton and Carl Richardson.

Officers: Gill Alexander, Chief Executive
Hayley Martin, Interim Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Director of Finance and Policy
Claire McLaren, Assistant Director, Corporate Services
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

38. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Kevin Cranney and Leisa Smith.

39. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Sue Little declared a personal interest in Minute No. 44.

40. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2018

Confirmed.

41. Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 25 June 2018

Received.

42. The Provision of Infrastructure Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Key Decision (test (i) and (ii)) Forward Plan Reference No. RN28/18.

Purpose of report

To consider a new model for providing infrastructure support to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Hartlepool and agree the key areas of support.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that in the Community Engagement and Cohesion Strategy the Council had set out its continuing commitment to supporting communities to take part and deliver on local priorities by developing their skills, confidence and local networks to create an environment where they can make change happen for themselves. The Director outlined a proposal for an infrastructure support model that it was recommended the Council adopts in order to support the VCS in the future.

The Director set out the current position and how the landscape for VCS originations had been affected in a similar way to local authorities following austerity. Consultation with VCS groups in the town had shown that they had felt the effects of reduced support and how support was key around issues such as grant bids and how a united voice for groups was important.

The Council was obviously well placed to provide the VCS with the support required due to internal links to commissioners and strategy development, along with opportunities to link the needs of the sector to existing services provided by the Council.

In particular some of the functions that currently fall within the responsibility of the Council's Learning and Skills, Community Safety and Engagement and sections alongside some of those within Preventions and Community Based Services carry the potential to provide a comprehensive offer capable of building individual, organisational and community capacity as envisaged by the Community Cohesion and Engagement Strategy.

The Director outlined the support currently available to groups through the Learning and Skills section, the Community Safety and Engagement section and the Community Hubs highlighting schemes such as Volunteer Hartlepool and the Step Forward Project.

The Director stated that given the significant knowledge, skills and expertise across the teams it is clear that there is an opportunity to maximize support

to the VCS. It was proposed, therefore, that a Voluntary and Community Sector Support Team be created involving the merger of the current functions of the existing Learning and Skills Service and the Community Engagement Service. Based within the Council's Learning and Skills Section the newly created Voluntary and Community Sector Support Team would benefit from links with the Business Operations, Curriculum, and Hartlepool Working Solutions Teams within that section, along with initiatives such as 'Route to Work' and the 'Youth Employment Initiative'. As the service would sit within the Regeneration Division close links would also be established with the Economic Growth Section, who, with their considerable business expertise would provide business development support to the VCS. The new team would provide a dedicated resource in relation to supporting the VCS with the following broad areas of support being provided:

- Helping VCS organisations to be strong organisations.
- Increasing Opportunity for individuals and the sector as a whole.
- Ensuring the VCS has a Voice.
- Building Individual and Community Capacity.

With a renewed focus on creating the conditions for the Voluntary and Community Sector to flourish and promoting social action the team will develop a detailed time limited 'Capacity Building Programme' for VCS groups that will build on existing individual and community assets and promote local resilience. This change in focus would mean that the Team will no longer provide indefinite support to groups, and they would no longer attend resident meetings in order to provide a conduit between the local community and Council Services in relation to neighbourhood issues and priorities. Similarly, ward priority meetings would no longer take place with Elected Members as Ward Surgeries, Elected Member attendance at resident groups, and the Council's Community Forums already provide a vehicle for the local community to raise neighbourhood issues with Members.

Whilst the team would no longer be involved in addressing neighbourhood issues and, therefore, the development and co-ordination of small scale projects aimed at addressing neighbourhood issues linked to Ward Member Budgets such as environmental schemes, the team would continue to receive and process applications to Ward Member Budgets the majority of which support the activities of local VCS groups. The Team would also continue to develop and deliver schemes and programmes that celebrate the work of the VCS and diversity in Hartlepool such as the Hartlepool in Unity Programme and the development of a rewards scheme to recognise the volunteering efforts of schools and community groups in relation to improving environmental quality. Support in organising key Partnership events such as the annual consultation on Health and Well Being priorities and Community Safety priorities will ensure that, alongside other measures, the VCS has a voice in setting strategic priorities.

The Director highlighted that there were a series of risk associated with the

changes proposed particularly the reduced capacity within the Community Safety Team and the associated reputational risks. The financial implications around the officers in the Positive Change Transforming Lives service where a move towards self sustainability would be required going forward.

The proposals were welcomed by some Members who saw a real opportunity to enhance the work of the officers. Many groups did not require additional input and a greater focus on getting other groups into that position was welcomed. There was some concern at the potential effects of withdrawing the support from some resident associations, for example, as Members were conscious that some would simply fold without council support. It was suggested that a six month timescale be introduced to assist existing and new groups build the necessary skills and resilience to continue without the local authority 'hand holding' on a permanent basis. It was recognised that some groups may also need at some time or other to call upon assistance in preparing and submitting bids for funding which was a particular strength of the Community Safety officers and this work would continue to be provided by the new VCS infrastructure support team.

Members also discussed issues around volunteers and were conscious of volunteers not being seen as a resource simply to keep groups going but that there were clear opportunities for volunteers to develop as both individuals and their skills. Members asked if a database of the various volunteers available from the various businesses around the town could be available so that they were appropriately matched to volunteering opportunities.

Several Members spoke of their own experiences with the support provided by officers from the Community Safety officers over past years stating that their knowledge, support and professionalism had been key in ensuring many community projects had come forward. Members did, however express some serious concerns at the removal of support, as they believed this would simply cause many resident groups to cease.

The Chief Executive stated that this did not mean the removal of the Community Cohesion Officers but was a proposal based around bringing officers supporting the community together into one coordinated team. It was a difficult balance to assess when support could be withdrawn but these groups did need to build their own independence. It was simply the case that such officers could not spend significant amounts of time producing minutes etc for groups that should be organising their own affairs. A much more intelligent approach to supporting such groups was required to ensure best use of the resources and this proposal gave that. In relation to Members concerns about volunteers, the Chief Executive agreed they were there to gain skills and experience and bringing the service together into one team would assure that volunteers were utilised as a valuable resource giving the best experience for them and a supportive asset to VCS groups.

Members discussed the value of the Community Cohesion Officers and the role they had undertaken with community groups. It was acknowledged that Councillors themselves did provide the link between the community groups and the authority but some Members present were concerned that the loss of the non-political officer support. There were questions around the number of voluntary and community groups in the town and the support, including financial given. The Director commented that there were a number of larger groups, such as West View Advice and Resources Centre and some national charity 'local' groups, where the authority commissioned services through contracts but there was very little financial support given to VCS groups. All the financial support given was fully audited.

In concluding the debate the Chair commented that as well as seeking approval to the recommendations within the report, he would look to the addition of recommendations around a robust approach to volunteers to ensure they were allocated in accordance with their experience and interests and to ensure they gained appropriate skills and qualifications where appropriate. The Chair also indicated that recommendations building in a six month review of the new proposals together with support being available should a group, after becoming independent of local authority support, fall into crisis which could potentially lead to its cessation.

Decision

1. That the proposal for the creation of a Voluntary and Community Sector Support Team as outlined in the report be approved.
2. That approval be given to the transfer of the 3 staff within the Community Safety and Engagement section to the Learning and Skills Section.
3. That the time limited nature of some of the posts within the existing Learning and Skills section and the need to ensure that the new VCS Support Team is sustainable going forward be noted.
4. That approval be given to the scheduling of an event with the voluntary and community sector to assist in developing an action plan to support delivery of the VCS infrastructure model.
5. That future reports in relation to the VCS model are presented to the Regeneration Services Committee.
6. That a robust approach to volunteers be applied to ensure they were allocated in accordance with their experience and interests and also to ensure they gained skills and qualifications where appropriate.
7. That a review be reported to Members after six months of operation of the new proposals.
8. That support should remain available to a group which may, after

becoming independent of local authority support, fall into crisis that could potentially lead to its cessation.

43. Seaton Carew Additional Car Parking Facilities (Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)

Type of decision

Key decision (tests (i) and (ii) apply). Forward plan Ref RN27/18.

Purpose of report

To seek approval for the extension of the existing Sea View Car Park at Seaton Carew

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that in 2017 seasonal parking controls were introduced in Seaton Carew in order to improve traffic management, ensure a turnover of visitor parking in appropriate areas and enable an increased level of enforcement. Issues with parking availability remained and both residents and businesses had frequently called for additional capacity.

In recognition of the identified concerns expressed regarding limited parking provision in the Seaton area, the Director reported that a business case had been developed to extend the existing parking area on the Former Fairground site and a small section of land to the north. An indicative plan of the proposed extension and revised bay layout within the Sea View car park was included as an appendix to the report.

Development of the former Fairground site would visually improve and enhance the area. The site is currently used as an overflow parking area when capacity exceeds demand. The development of the Former Fairground site would create approximately 350 additional parking spaces whilst layout changes to the existing Sea View Car Park would provide a combined parking area for some 680 vehicles including the provision for designated disabled parking, coaches and long wheel base vehicles, as well as the provision for two mobile units. Construction work had been estimated at £390,000 with further costs for CCTV, landscaping, border fencing and street lighting in the order of £150,000.

The scheme would result in a financial commitment to fund the prudential borrowing costs of the capital expenditure which would require Council approval. The service area would be committed to a £37,000 annual repayment over a 25 year period, funded from income generated by the seasonal parking charges.

The Chair and Members welcomed the proposal as much needed additional parking capacity within Seaton Carew particularly as new visitor attractions

were now in place. Members questioned the number of disabled parking bays which the Director indicated would be provided in accordance with the approved guidance, though it was noted that 10 were mentioned in the report.

Decision

That the proposal to extend the Sea View Car Park at Seaton Carew be approved and that the proposal to use prudential borrowing of £540,000 be referred to Council for approval as a departure from the Budget and Policy Framework.

44. Corporate Procurement Quarterly Report on Contracts *(Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

To satisfy the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules with regard to the Finance and Policy Committee receiving and examining quarterly reports on the outcome of contract letting procedures including those where the lowest/highest price is not payable/receivable; and receiving and examining reports on any exemptions granted in respect of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Finance and Policy reported that alongside the detailed tender information set out in the appendices to the report, additional related information showing details of exemptions granted to the Contract Procedure Rules were also included in the quarterly report.

Decision

That the report be noted.

45. Corporate Complaints Annual Monitoring Report 2017/18 *(Assistant Director, Corporate Services)*

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to inform Finance and Policy Committee of the 2017/18 outturn position in relation to corporate complaints and those

considered by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services reported that there had been a total of 17 corporate complaints were received in 2017/18. The historical comparison showed that the number of complaints received year on year was decreasing with 2 less than 2016/17 and 5 less than 2014/15. In total 7 of the corporate complaints received in 2017/18 were upheld or partly upheld. This was 2 less than the number upheld or partly upheld in 2016/17 but more than those upheld or partly upheld in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

The LGO Annual Review 2018 letter set out the annual statistics on complaints made to the LGO about Hartlepool Borough Council for the year ending 31st March 2018. In summary, during 2017/18 the LGO:

- Received 25 complaints or enquiries about Hartlepool Borough Council, an increase of 5 on the previous year;
- In total the LGO made decisions on 23 complaints with only 6 being subject to detailed investigation, 1 less than the previous year;
- Of the 6 complaints subject to detailed investigation by the LGO 3 were upheld or partly upheld;
- All 3 complaints upheld by the LGO had already been upheld or partly upheld by the Council through the corporate complaints process and were from 3 different residents in relation to the same project.

A comparison of LGO data for 2017/18 for the North East region showed that Hartlepool has the lowest number of complaints and enquiries received in the North East and the joint third lowest uphold rate. It also showed that Hartlepool had the lowest number of complaints referred back for Local Resolution which demonstrated that the Council was publicising and using its corporate complaints policy effectively.

The Assistant Director reported that a review of the Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments and Unreasonable Behaviour policies had taken place and a number of minor amendments had been made to the published policies.

Decision

That the report be noted.

46. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 29 October 2018 at 10.00 am in the Civic Centre.

The Interim Chief Solicitor left the meeting at this point.

47. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

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 they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs referred to below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 48 – (Legal Services Restructure) – This item contains 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 information which is likely to reveal the information of an individual.

48. Legal Services Restructure (*Chief Executive*) This item contains 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 information which is likely to reveal the information of an individual.

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

This report made recommendations to Finance and Policy Committee in respect of the Chief Officer structure of the Council's Legal Services Division.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Chief Executive outlined the previous and current interim arrangements relating to the Legal Services Division and proposed a restructure of the senior management of the division with recommendations for permanent arrangements to be put in place. Further details are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

Decision

1. That the proposed structure of the Legal Services Division and the deletion of the posts identified in the Not for Publication element of the report be approved.
2. That the new post and grading set out in the Not for Publication element of the report be approved.

3. That a meeting of the Appointments Panel be convened to consider the recommendation of this Committee detailed in section 6 of the Not for Publication element of the report.

The meeting concluded at 11.00 am.

H MARTIN

INTERIM CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 18 OCTOBER 2018