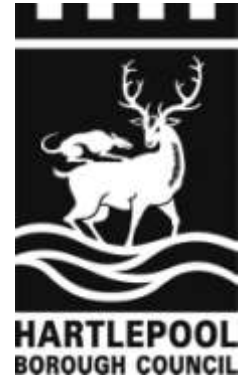


FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

AGENDA



Monday 29 October 2018

at 10.00 am

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool.**

MEMBERS: FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

Councillors C Akers-Belcher, S Akers-Belcher, Brown, Cassidy, Cranney, Harrison, Marshall, Moore, Smith, Thomas and Young.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee held on 8 October 2018.
- 3.2 To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Safer Hartlepool Partnership held on 3 August 2018.

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

- 4.1 Local Council Tax Support 2019/20 – *Director of Finance and Policy*
- 4.2 Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20 Mid-Term Review – *Chief Executive*

5. KEY DECISIONS

- 5.1 Stimulating the Visitor Economy – 5 Year Funding Strategy – *Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*



6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 6.1 Employee Sickness Absence Annual Report 2017/18- *Assistant Director, Corporate Services*
- 6.2 Updated Local Welfare Support Framework – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 6.3 Updated Discretionary Housing Payment Frameworks – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

No items.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Future meeting dates –

Monday 26 November 2018 at 10.00 am
Monday 17 December 2018 at 10.00 am
Monday 14 January 2019 at 10.00 am
Monday 28 January 2019 at 10.00 am
Monday 11 March 2019 at 10.00 am



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

SAFER HARTLEPOOL PARTNERSHIP MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

3 August 2018

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

Present:

Councillor: Christopher Akers-Belcher (In the Chair)
Councillor Jim Lindridge
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Barry Coppinger, Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
Chief Inspector Nigel Burnell, Chair of Youth Offending Board
John Bentley, Safe in Tees Valley
Simon Weastell, Cleveland Fire Authority
Chris Joynes, Thirteen Group
Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Also Present:

Rachelle Kipling, Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
Alison Peevor, was in attendance as substitute for Jean Golightly

Officers: Kate Ainger, Research Officer, Hartlepool Community Safety Team
Phil Hepburn, Community Safety Operations Manager
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

11. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Ann Powell, Head of Cleveland Area, National Probation Service, John Graham, Director of Operations, Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company, Tony Hanson, Assistant Director, Environment and Neighbourhood Services, Hartlepool Borough Council, Chief Superintendent Alastair Simpson, Cleveland Police and Jean Golightly, Director of Nursing and Quality, NHS Hartlepool and Stockton on Tees CCG.

12. Declarations of Interest

None.

13. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2018

Confirmed.

14. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Minute 9 – Safer Hartlepool Partnership Performance

With regard to the request at the last meeting that a report be submitted to a future meeting outlining the work undertaken with troubled families in Hartlepool and the consequent impact on crime, clarification was sought in terms of the timescales for submission of this report. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods advised that a report would be presented to the October meeting.

15. Prevent Update – Contest Strategy 2018 *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Purpose of report

To update the Partnership following the Government's review of its counter-terrorism strategy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported on the background to the Prevent Strategy and statutory duty and responsibilities upon local councils for embedding and co-ordinating Prevent activity in their local area. The 2018 Contest Strategy would be underpinned by the introduction of new legislation that would seek to amend existing terrorism legislation to enable earlier disruption using investigations, longer prison sentences and stronger management of terrorist offenders following their release.

The Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill 2017-2019 was currently at the Committee stage in the House of Commons which would introduce legislative changes, details of which were set out in the report. The Partnership was advised that the Local Prevent Operational Group would consider the impact that any legislative changes may have on the delivery of Prevent activity in Hartlepool, the outcome of which would be reported to a future meeting of the Partnership.

Decision

That the contents of the report, be noted.

16. Safer Hartlepool Partnership Performance *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Purpose of report

To provide an overview of Safer Hartlepool Partnership performance for Quarter 1 – April 2018 to June 2018 (inclusive).

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided an overview of the Partnership's performance during Quarter 1, as set out in an appendix to the report. Information as a comparator with performance in the previous year was also provided. In presenting the report, the Research Officer highlighted salient positive and negative data and responded to queries in relation to crime figures by type.

Partnership Members discussed issues arising from the report. The Chair was pleased to note the decrease in crime figures generally as a comparator with the previous year, referring to reductions in vehicle crime, anti-social behaviour and hate crime incidents. The Police and Crime Commissioner highlighted that an analysis of hate crime incidents was being undertaken which included the Crown Prosecution Service carrying out additional work around prosecutions to identify when hate crime incidents were occurring, the outcome of which would be shared with Partnership Members in due course.

The Chair of the Youth Offending Board commented on the work carried out by the police in relation to problem solving and it was hoped that a sustained reduction in all areas of hate crime would continue and would be reflected in the next reporting period.

The Chair requested that future performance reports should include accumulative totals as well as 6 monthly figures to enable comparators to be made during the various reporting periods.

Decision

- (i) That the Quarter 1 performance figures be noted and comments of Members be noted and actioned as appropriate.
- (ii) That feedback from the analysis of Hate Crime incidents be reported to a future meeting of the Partnership.
- (iii) That future performance reports include accumulative totals as well as 6 monthly figures to enable comparators to be made during the various reporting periods.

17. **Integrated Working – Neighbourhood Safety Group Update** *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Purpose of report

To receive a progress update in relation to implementation of the integrated place based community safety model agreed by the Finance and Policy Committee in October 2017.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods presented the report which provided background information to the development of a 'place based integrated service delivery model' between community safety partners in Hartlepool.

Following implementation of the model in February 2018, an interim review of the Hartlepool Integrated Community Safety Model, attached at Appendix 2, had been undertaken which covered the first three months of operation. The review identified that the model had largely been implemented as intended and within the anticipated timescales. A number of benefits had been identified as a result of bringing the teams together, details of which were set out in the report.

The Chair of the Youth Offending Board, who was responsible for leading the new team, provided an update in relation to the benefits of the new working arrangements:-

- Improved problem solving as a result of daily briefings and early identification of risk
- Identifiable efficiencies
- Improved exchange of intelligence as a result of co-location
- Core team benefiting from broader knowledge and expertise
- The Team Around the Individual approach had also improved co-ordination on the ground in relation to managing individuals with complex needs

In the discussion that followed Partnership Members welcomed the report and spoke in support of the initiative. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland highlighted that Hartlepool was leading the way in terms of integrated working and was keen to share such good practice with other partnership areas.

In response to clarification sought, the Partnership was provided with examples of the positive feedback that had been received from staff in relation to the new working arrangements.

With regard to areas for improvement, it was acknowledged that there was little evidence of any planned joint work or operations in relation to known or emerging vulnerable localities. Emphasis was placed upon the need to improve communication with Elected Members in terms of sharing planned ward activities to enable Members to feed information of this type into community groups and ward surgeries. The importance of effectively publicising the positive work that was ongoing in Hartlepool with the public was highlighted. The various methods of communicating such information were discussed including the option to utilise a low level Members' Seminar or Ward bulletins.

A Member commented on the importance of engaging with young people in schools at an early stage to address any negative behaviours. The issues associated with gaining access to schools were highlighted. The Police and Crime Commissioner advised the Partnership that discussions were ongoing in relation to a pilot around anti-social cycling activities, an update of which would be provided to a future meeting of the Partnership.

In response to comments made regarding the need to promote activity in community hubs, the Partnership was advised that plans were in place to address low turnout in community hubs which included posts being scheduled on social media and a feature to be included in the next round of Hartbeat. Clarification was provided in relation to the role of the Neighbourhood Safety Group in terms of monitoring issues raised by Partnership Members.

Clarification was provided in response to further queries raised in relation to restorative processes and the various interventions to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

In concluding the debate the Chair took the opportunity to convey the Partnership's thanks for a comprehensive report and was pleased to note the early benefits for Hartlepool as a result of the new working arrangements.

Decision

That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted.

18. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The Chair reported that the next meeting would be held on Friday 12 October 2018 at 10.00 am.

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am.

CHAIR

Finance and Policy Committee

29th October 2018



Report of: Director of Finance and Policy

Subject: LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT 2019/20

1. TYPE OF DECISION / APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Budget and Policy Framework Decision.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purposes of the report are to:

- i) Update Members on the operation of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme and the scheme's future financial risks associated with the Government's national welfare reforms;
- ii) set out a proposed LCTS scheme for 2019/20.

3. BACKGROUND

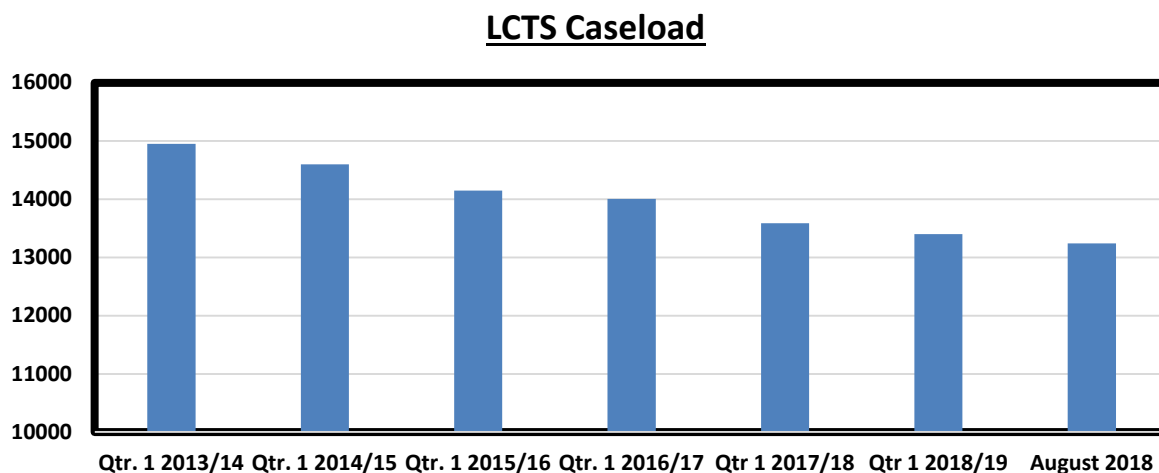
3.1 The Coalition Government abolished the former national Council Tax Benefit scheme on 31st March 2013 and replaced it with a requirement for Councils to determine and operate their own LCTS schemes from April 2013.

3.2 This was a fundamental change to the Welfare State which transferred responsibility for Council Tax support from the national Government to individual Councils. Previous reports to Members have set out three key issues arising from this change:-

- (i) Funding transferred by the Government for 2013/14 LCTS schemes was cut overall by 10% nationally. However, when account was taken of the value of awards the initial grant cut for Hartlepool for 2013/14 was 13.4%;
- (ii) Councils are required to fully protect low income Pensioners eligible for LCTS support, which means the initial funding cut falls on working age households and effectively built a 20% reduction for this group into the system;

- (iii) Since April 2014 Central Government funding for LCTS is no longer provided as a separate grant allocation but has been included in the annual Core Revenue Grant allocation for individual Councils.
- 3.3 It would have been much clearer for Councils and the public, if funding for LCTS schemes had continued to be paid as a specific grant. The new arrangements have a significantly greater impact on Councils which are more dependent on Government Grant and have higher levels of deprivation.
- 3.4 Previous Medium Term Financial Strategy reports have highlighted the implications of this change and the ongoing annual reductions in Revenue Support Grant. Despite these challenges, the Council has determined, as part of its strategy to support vulnerable households affected by the national Welfare Reforms, to avoid implementing LCTS cuts of 20% over the last five years and has implemented the following LCTS schemes:
- 8.5% in 2013/14;
 - 12% in 2014/15;
 - 12% in 2015/16;
 - 12% in 2016/17;
 - 12% in 2017/18;
 - 12% in 2018/19.
- 3.5 Details of the number of households and the value of support they have received in Hartlepool, as compared to a 20% LCTS scheme are provided in section 7.1. Other Tees Valley councils have operated LCTS schemes involving cuts of 20% since April 2013, albeit Redcar and Cleveland moved to a 17.5% scheme from 2017/18 and Middlesbrough have introduced a 15% scheme from 2018/19.
- 3.6. The actual cost of the Council's LCTS scheme is determined by a range of external factors including, the total number of households accessing support, the balance of claimants between pensionable age and working age and the particular financial circumstances of individual claimants as Council Tax support continues to be means tested support.
- 3.7. The Council now has six years experience of operating a LCTS scheme covering:
- 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 – both estimated costs and outturn costs;
 - 2018/19 – estimated costs
- 3.8 On the basis of this experience, the LCTS financial model has been updated to reflect changes in the key cost drivers – i.e. claimant numbers and Council Tax collection levels, as detailed in the following paragraphs.
- 3.9 **Claimant numbers** - Since June 2013, there has been a gradual reduction in the numbers of households receiving LCTS covering both Pensioner Households (a protected group under LCTS) and Working Age Households,

from approximately 15,000 households in June 2013 to about 13,000 in August 2018.

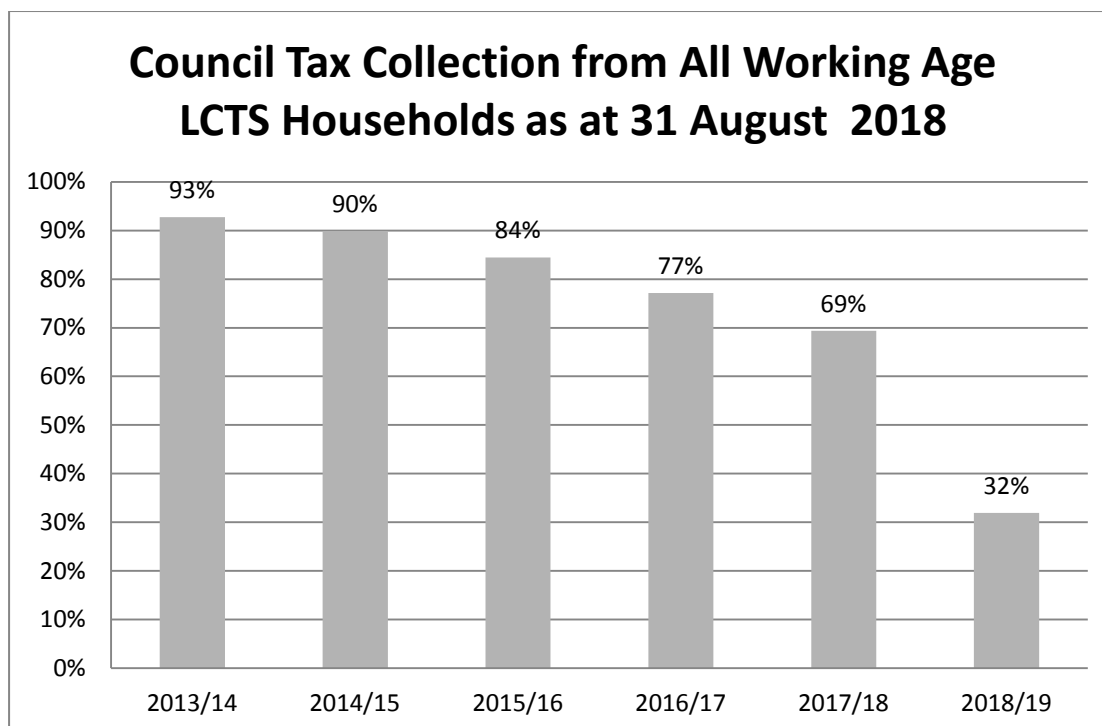


3.10 This trend was reflected in the 2018/19 LCTS scheme modelling. An updated assessment of caseload trends has been completed and further incremental reductions in claimant numbers are anticipated for future years and these have been factored into scheme forecasts. However, as well as global economic volatilities, there are economic and employment uncertainties following the decision to leave the European Union, which may impact in the short to medium term. In addition, the LCTS scheme will in future years continue to be impacted by further national welfare reforms.

3.11 **Collection Levels** – in Hartlepool, the operation of the LCTS scheme means that in 2018/19 about 5,900 working age households have received a Council Tax Bill who would have been exempt under Council Tax Benefit; and a further 2,100 working age households have received a higher Council Tax Bill. Robust and proportionate arrangements for collecting Council Tax from LCTS households are embedded within the Council's recovery arrangements to reflect the financial circumstances of households, whilst balancing the needs of the Council to collect this income to pay for services.

3.12 Collecting Council Tax from LCTS households is more difficult and resource intensive, as these households are less likely to pay by Direct Debit and make payments in different ways i.e. Attachment of Benefit Order and a greater proportion who pay by cash, either at the Civic Centre or via the Post Office and Paypoint network at local shops.

3.13 The Council monitors the levels of collection from LCTS households. The graph below shows that collection of Council Tax from these households is positive, albeit there is the anticipated time lag in securing collection. This positive level of collection reflects the Council's decision to retain a 12% scheme, which significantly reduces the financial burden on low income households. The collection performance has been reflected in the revised scheme forecasts for 2019/20 onwards



3.14 Modelling the LCTS scheme costs beyond 2019/20 is complex and challenging owing to the many variables affecting scheme costs, including the total number of claimants, both pensioner households and working age households, individual claimants' financial circumstances and eligibility for support.

4. PROPOSALS

4.1. Members need to determine a LCTS scheme for 2019/20 that is financially viable and balanced providing for sustainability in future year's schemes.

4.2. Updated financial modelling indicates that the 2019/20 LCTS scheme reduction should be able to be maintained at 12%, the same level as financial years 2014/15 to 2018/19. This is predicated on the actual central government grant cut for 2019/20 being consistent with the indicative data provided in the DCLG multi-year settlement offer and a range of forecast scheme cost pressures and savings linked to welfare reforms, economic factors and fraud / error initiatives. If the future settlement funding profile and the Council's Tax Base projections are significantly different to current forecasts, the ability of the Council to sustain a scheme involving a 12% LCTS cut will need to be re-evaluated.

4.3. As previously reported to Members, a LCTS Risk Reserve has been established to support the LCTS scheme and to provide one-off funding to manage the risk of an unexpected in-year increase in LCTS costs arising from increased caseloads. It is proposed to maintain this reserve at £0.3m to manage any in-year financial risks that may emerge.

- 4.4. LCTS entitlements are determined using a complex means tested calculation. Many councils are applying within their LCTS schemes those changes being applied by the DWP to the national Housing Benefit scheme. This approach has historically been followed in the Hartlepool LCTS scheme and it is proposed that this continues for 2019/20 to “mirror” national changes to promote consistency and simplify administrative processes.
- 4.5. A number of core principles as set out in section 5.7. underpin the Council’s LCTS scheme and have been in place since 2013/14. These principles are embedded and robust and it is proposed that these principles are carried forward into the 2019/20 scheme.

5 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. The LCTS scheme forecasts for 2019/20 and future years have been updated to reflect experience of operating the LCTS scheme to date and the latest caseload forecasts. These scheme cost forecasts are based on the indicative 2019/20 Council Tax increases approved in February 2018, which reflects the Government’s Council Tax referendum limits (including the Adult Social Care precept) and continued shift of funding of local services from Government grant to Council Tax.
- 5.2. In summary, the updated financial forecasts for the LCTS scheme for the period 2018/19 to 2020/21 are based on the following planning assumptions:

Key Planning assumptions underpinning LCTS forecasts for 2018/19 to 2020/21

- i) The actual future grant cut for 2019/20 is in line with the existing planning assumptions and the multi-year settlement offer from DCLG;
 - ii) The existing Working Age caseload continuing to incrementally reduce;
 - iii) The retention of an un-committed LCTS Risk Reserve of £0.3m to manage LCTS financial risks to provide a slightly longer lead time for the Council to respond to changes in forecasts;
 - iv) LCTS entitlements continue to reduce linked to the impacts of DWP counter fraud and error initiatives.
- 5.3. Regular reviews of these factors will continue to be undertaken to assess the implications of any changes in these planning assumptions which are inevitable and unavoidable, as the majority of factors are outside the Council’s direct control.
- 5.4. There is a direct inter- relationship between the LCTS scheme, the level of cut in LCTS awards, adjustments for forecast non collection of Council Tax from

LCTS households and the Council Tax Base calculation. The Council Tax Base calculation is also significantly impacted by future housing growth within the Borough.

- 5.5. The following table summarises how the value of LCTS awards is forecast to increase over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (based on sustaining a 12% LCTS cut). This has been factored into the MTFS Tax Base forecasts reported separately to Members.

Forecast Cost of LCTS Awards
2018/19 to 2020/21

	18/19	19/20	20/21
	£m	£m	£m
Cost of LCTS Support	12.90	13.32	13.48
Working Age Contribution 12%	0.94	0.98	1.00
Net Cost of LCTS Awards	<u>11.96</u>	<u>12.33</u>	<u>12.48</u>

- 5.6. Continuing with a 12% LCTS cut for 2019/20 would avoid an increase in the Council Tax liability of low income working age households at a time when households continue to be impacted by the Government's ongoing welfare savings programme. This level of LCTS support will also increase the likelihood of the Council maintaining high levels of Council Tax collection in 2019/20. A report by the New Policy Institute in August 2017 concluded that local authorities with the highest levels of cut in LCTS had the largest increases in uncollected Council Tax.
- 5.7. In common with LCTS schemes established by many other Councils, the Hartlepool LCTS scheme has been centred on a number of core principles for the period 2013/14 to 2018/19. These core principles are clear, fair and are now embedded. In summary these principles are that:

A - Every working age household should pay something towards Council Tax

All Working age claimants will have their LCTS entitlements recalculated and reduced to ensure an affordable and sustainable scheme.

B - Everyone in the Household should contribute appropriately

Hartlepool will implement Central Government changes to the value of non dependant adult deductions from Council Tax Support entitlements.

C - The LCTS scheme should encourage work

Claimants will be allowed to keep more of their earnings before they are taken into account in the LCTS award calculation. The Hartlepool LCTS scheme increases earnings disregards by £5 per week; to £10, £15 and £30 for single person, couple and single parent households respectively.

D - Streamline / Simplify the LCTS Scheme

The Hartlepool LCTS scheme will continue to remove 2nd Adult Rebate, and restrict backdating of LCTS to a maximum of 4 weeks.

E - Retain War Widows / War Pensions Local disregards framework

Under the national CTB regulations Local Authorities are required to disregard the first £10 per week of War Pension Scheme and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments. In addition Local Authorities have the discretion to top up the disregard to the full amount. Hartlepool has historically applied the discretionary top up and this continues to apply in the Council's LCTS scheme.

- 5.8. In relation to Parish Councils, the national regulations require Billing Authorities (i.e. Hartlepool Borough Council) to pass on an element of the Council Tax Support Grant received to individual Parish Councils. For some Local Authorities with a large number of Parish Councils levying relatively high Parish Council Tax precepts this may be a significant issue. This is not the case for Hartlepool as the total share of the grant for all Parish Councils is estimated at around £4,000 for 2019/20.

6 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1. Councils are required to determine and operate their own LCTS scheme for each financial year. Once a LCTS scheme has been set for a financial year it cannot be altered for that year.

7 CHILD / FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1. Households in receipt of welfare benefits continue to be impacted by the breadth of the national welfare reforms. The Council recognises these issues and has sustained a LCTS scheme involving a 12% cut since 2014/15. If the Council were to approve a 12% LCTS cut for 2019/20, the table below shows that the Council's locally approved LCTS scheme will have provided important financial support to low income working age households compared to cuts of 20%. Other Tees Valley Councils have historically operated LCTS schemes involving cuts of 20%, albeit Redcar and Cleveland moved to a 17.5% scheme from 2017/18 and Middlesbrough have introduced a 15% scheme from 2018/19.

Impact of Hartlepool's actual 2013/14 to 2018/19 LCTS scheme and proposed 2019/20 LCTS cut compared to annual cuts of 20%.

	Band A	Band B
Council Tax Liability with a 20% LCTS cut in 2013/14, to 2019/20.	£ 1,678	£ 1,958
Council Tax Liability with <u>HBC phased LCTS cuts</u> of 8.5 % in 13/14 and 12% in 14/15, 15/16, 16/17,17/18, 18/19 and 19/20.	£ 967	£ 1,129
Cumulative Support to Households 2013/14 to 2019/20	£ 711	£ 829
Number of Households Supported (i.e. who previously received 100% Council Tax Benefit)	5,224	433
Percentage of LCTS Households (i.e. who previously received 100% Council Tax Benefit)	89%	7%

- 7.2. Furthermore, the Hartlepool LCTS scheme complements the recently approved local policy of exempting Hartlepool Care Leavers from Council Tax until the age of 25. The Care Leaver policy removes a key financial challenge and provides an additional foundation as Care Leavers move to independence and adult life.

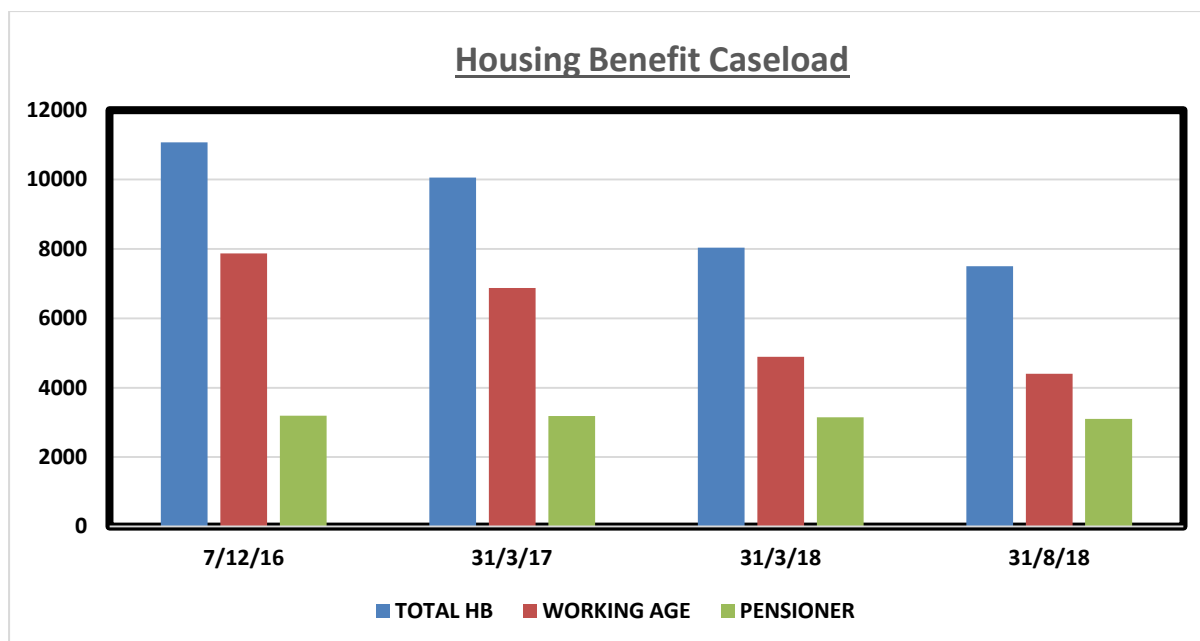
8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. An Impact Assessment covering LCTS has been reviewed and is included as Appendix A.

9. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1. There are current economies and efficiencies in administering LCTS as many of the underlying principles mirror the national Housing Benefit scheme. Funding is provided annually by the DWP to councils to administer Housing Benefit and by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for Local Council Tax Support. Many claims for support are dual, covering both Housing Benefit and LCTS and the process and calculations of entitlement are currently undertaken together.
- 9.2. However, the scope of the DWP's Universal Credit (UC) initiative continues to expand as councils move to "full service UC" whereby working age benefit claimants of all types are moved onto UC when their personal circumstances change. These households transferring no longer receive housing benefit from the Council but instead receive housing support as part of their Universal Credit.

- 9.3. Nationally, as at May 2018 there were about 920,000 working age people receiving UC. In Hartlepool 44% of working age housing benefit claimants have already transferred to UC. This caseload transfer is closely monitored as shown in the graph below. The DWP has future plans to increase the numbers transferring through a managed migration process. Current confirmed DWP plans are for managed migration pilots to commence in January 2019, with full national roll out commencing July 2019. However, it is anticipated that these plans will be delayed and a future formal announcement will be made by the DWP on revised dates for the managed migration process.



- 9.4. DWP funding to individual councils to cover their costs of administering housing benefit is notified in an annual funding allocation. Core DWP funding for Hartlepool has been declining reflecting caseload reductions and also because the DWP national funding for Housing Benefit administration grant has been cut as part of savings targets for central government departments.
- 9.5. In future, Hartlepool together with all other Councils will face the challenge of administering LCTS and a reduced Housing Benefit caseload (pensioner housing benefit will continue to be delivered by Councils) against a background of reduced overall central government administration funding.
- 9.6. For 2019/20 the forecast reduction in DWP Housing Benefit administration grant funding can be covered by an earmarked reserve. However, from 2020/21 depending on the future pace of the managed migration to UC process, the Council will potentially be faced with a General Fund budget pressure or alternatively will need to develop a new simpler way of administering LCTS at a lower cost. A future report on potential options will be submitted to members for consideration. The development of a new LCTS scheme will require comprehensive consultation and engagement with a range of stakeholders.

10. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

10.1 There are no asset management considerations.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A – Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 It is recommended that Members:

- i. Note the future financial and administrative risks associated with the LCTS scheme;
- ii. Approve a 2019/20 LCTS scheme involving a cut of 12% to be referred to full Council.

13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 To update Finance and Policy Committee on latest available data on the LCTS scheme costs and the future risks associated with the Government's national welfare reforms.

13.2. To enable Members to agree a LCTS scheme for 2019/20 to refer to full Council.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 There are no background papers.

15. CONTACT OFFICER

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Department	Division	Section	Owner/Officer
Chief Executives	Finance	Revenues & Benefits	John Morton
Function/ Service	Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20, Universal 12% reduction in LCTS Awards (excl. low income pensioners).		
Information Available	HBC data on caseload / awards, financial modelling of local scheme ,CLG full EIA, Family Resources Survey data, Census 2011, ONS population statistics, DWP data.		
Relevance <i>Identify which strands are relevant to the area you are reviewing or changing</i>	Age		
	The Government considered the position of low income pensioners associated with the abolition of Council Tax Benefit and the introduction of LCTS. The Government determined that unlike most other groups, pensioners cannot reasonably be expected to seek paid employment to increase their income. Therefore the Government determined that as a specific vulnerable group, low income pensioners should be protected from any reduction in support as a result of this reform. The Government has not changed its position on this core principle for 2019/20.		
	In Hartlepool 5,180 low income pensioners account for 39% of all LCTS claimants and the Council is required by Government to continue to protect this group.		
	Disability		
	It is difficult to quantify accurately either the number of disabled people living in Hartlepool or the number of households in receipt of LCTS and where an individual in that household is receiving a disability related benefit.		
	Fundamentally, the 2019/20 Hartlepool LCTS scheme continues with the core equity Principle that every working age household should pay something to towards Council Tax and that the level of cut should be equal. The Council endeavours to minimise the impact of LCTS but the LCTS scheme does not provide for protection / detriment for any specific working age group.		
	Race / Gender / Gender Re-assignment		
	The Government does not believe 'that this nationally driven policy change will disproportionately affect any particular gender or ethnicity'. The Government has not changed its position on this core principle for 2019/20. However both nationally and locally, there are significantly more female than male council tax support claimants, reflecting the number of single female claimants with child dependants. Only about 2.3% of Hartlepool's population are non-white. It is not known how many of this group claim LCTS, as data within the LCTS system is incomplete for this group. The 2019 /20 Hartlepool LCTS scheme does not provide for protection / detriment for any specific working age group		

	Religion		
	No effect		
	Sexual Orientation		
	No effect		
	Marriage & Civil Partnership		
	No effect		
	Pregnancy & Maternity		
	No effect		
Information Gaps	<i>Nil.</i>		
What is the Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every working age household will pay some Council Tax• Other non dependant adults in the household will be expected to contribute to council tax• The scheme will encourage work• The 2019/20 LCTS scheme will continue to be based on the key features of the former CTB scheme and will “mirror” national Housing Benefit regulation changes• A universal 12% reduction in the value of the award will be made for all working age low income households.• Low income pensioner households are protected in line with Central Government Policy.• The 2019/20 LCTS scheme will continue to comply with the Armed Forces Covenant.• The 2019/20 LCTS scheme will continue to fully disregard child maintenance when assessing LCTS awards. This is consistent with national Housing Benefit regulations.		
Addressing the impact	1. No Major Change - The proposal is robust there is no potential for discrimination across working age claimants. (The council has no choice on the protection of low income pensioners).		
	The maintenance in the level of cuts to LCTS awards for 2019/20 at 12% sustains financial support as households adjust to the impacts of the wider national benefit reforms. The 2019/20 Hartlepool scheme continues to provide no protection/ detriment for any specific working age group and is centred on equality of impact.		
Actions			
<i>The 2019/20 LCTS scheme has been developed with the aim of removing any potential for discrimination.</i>			
Action identified	Responsible Officer	By When	How will this be evaluated?
Scheme Principles review	Liz Cook Principal Benefits Officer	Sept 19	Peer review by Chief Executive’s Department Diversity Lead officer.

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

29th October 2018



Report of: Chief Executive

Subject: COUNCIL PLAN 2017/18 – 2019/20
MID TERM REVIEW

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

Budget and Policy Framework

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update elected members on the progress made at the mid-point of the Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20 and to set out the proposed amended Plan for agreement.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20 was adopted by Council on 16th March 2017. The Plan, which was developed following the Your Say, Our Future consultation with residents and staff, sets out the priorities that the Council is committed to delivering by 2020.

4. COUNCIL PLAN - MID-TERM REVIEW AND PROGRESS TO DATE

- 4.1 It is now 18 months since the Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20 was approved and the Council has delivered on a range of priorities during that time. At this mid-way point it is felt timely to reflect on the achievements the Council has made and also to review the Plan to ensure that it continues to set out the priorities that the Council is committed to delivering by 2020. A summary of progress against the Plan to date is set out on pages 3 to 6 of Appendix 1.
- 4.2 With these achievements in mind the mid-term review has led to an updated Plan as set out on pages 6 to 11 of appendix 1. In summary, the Plan has been updated to:
- Remove those key deliverables that have been achieved;

- Amend those key deliverables where the future direction has changed or become clearer due to early work that has been completed;
- Include new key deliverables reflecting priorities that have emerged since the Council Plan was agreed in March 2017;
- Identify a suite of performance indicators that more clearly reflect the outcomes that the Council is aiming to deliver through the Council Plan.

5. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

- 5.1 The Council has a legal duty to publish a set of equality objectives in April at least every 4 years. Since the first objectives were published in April 2012 the Council has used the relevant outcomes and actions from our Council Plan in order to demonstrate that equality is a core part of our work. This practice has been continued and the equality objectives that have been identified are set out on pages 11 and 12 of appendix 1.

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 Once the Plan has been considered and approved by the Committee today progress on the Plan will be monitored throughout the year by officers across the Council and reported to Elected Members through Finance and Policy Committee on a 6 monthly basis.

7. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council needs appropriate planning and performance management arrangements in place in order to manage its key strategic risks. The aim of the Council Plan is to provide assurance to Elected Members that these risks are being managed.

8. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 All proposals will be prepared giving due regard to financial considerations. The Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy and the 5 year Capital Plan are developed as three parts of a single plan to ensure the links between the three are strengthened.

9. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 Whilst the Council Plan (formally Corporate Plan) is not included in the list of plans and strategies required to be approved or adopted by the Local Authority under Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Committee System) (England) Regulations 2012, it is recommended good practice to do so and therefore is included as part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

10. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

- 10.1 The strategic priorities and key deliverables identified in the Council Plan will work to reduce child and family poverty within Hartlepool. Specifically the plan aims to deliver: support into high value sustainable employment and also apprenticeship opportunities; improved educational attainment; high standards of career advice and enterprise education in all schools; increased availability of social housing; widened family participation in sport and leisure utilising Sport England funding. The Child and Family Poverty Impact Assessment is included as appendix 2.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 The strategic priorities and key deliverables identified in the Council Plan aim to have a positive impact on the whole population of Hartlepool. In relation to the protected groups identified in the Equality Act there are key deliverables focusing specifically on improving outcomes for young people, older people and those with disabilities in addition to work with staff to improve awareness of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. The Equality Impact Assessment is included as appendix 3. In addition the Council Plan sets out the Council's Equality Objectives as required through the Public Sector Equality Duty (pages 11 and 12 of appendix 1).

12. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 No implications.

13. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.1 No implications.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 It is recommended that the Finance and Policy Committee considers and agrees the amended Council Plan 2017/18 - 2019/20.

15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 Finance & Policy Committee have overall responsibility for Performance Management and are the responsible Committee for a number of service areas contained within the proposed Council Plan.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20 report to Finance and Policy Committee 6th March 2017.

Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20 report to Council 16th March 2017.

17. CONTACT OFFICER

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Council Plan 2017-2020 Mid-Term Review

Introduction

Despite unprecedented challenges for local government Hartlepool Borough Council continues to shape a vibrant and exciting future for the Borough. Evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies shows that Hartlepool has been one of the hardest hit councils in terms of reduction in central government funding. Yet we've maintained our drive to make Hartlepool an exciting place to live, work, invest and grow up.

We launched our vision and three year plan in 2017 and this midpoint review 18 months on shows that we are rapidly delivering real and tangible progress in the regeneration of Hartlepool, and in delivering first class education and skills provision, new and better housing, improved neighbourhoods, more job opportunities, better family support services, co-ordinated community- based services and high quality services for vulnerable adults. External inspections of our services consistently praise the council for providing good and outstanding services and we have been the proud winners of many national and regional awards for our innovative approach.

Our Vision

We are one Council, one Team. We recognise that we all contribute to our achievements and we are all dedicated to doing our best for our town. Our overarching vision is that:

Hartlepool will be a vibrant, welcoming and inspiring place to live, visit, work, invest and grow up

Our Values

In striving to make this vision a reality we pride ourselves in making Hartlepool Borough Council where:

- Everyone feels valued, respected and included
- We strive for excellence and celebrate achievement
- Our wellbeing is taken seriously and positively promoted
- We continually look for new and better ways of working, including collaborating with partners and our communities
- We work safely, protect the health and safety of others and care for the environment

Our Strategic Priorities

Following wide consultation we shaped our Council plan around six key priorities:

- **Growing our economy, jobs and skills**
- **Regenerating our town**
- **Developing and promoting Hartlepool as a great place to live**
- **Developing new services for people and communities**
- **Building better beginnings and better futures for our children and young people**
- **Providing effective leadership based on innovation and efficiency**

Our Achievements so far

To ensure we maintain our focus we have reviewed our progress to date and refocused our actions to ensure we deliver on the vision and goals we set out in 2017.

GROWING OUR JOBS, ECONOMY AND SKILLS

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promoted our tourism and visitor economy through a new promotional campaign ‘Destination Hartlepool’ supported by a co-ordinated events and festival programme, new gateway signage via road and rail and the Waterfront summer festival which attracted 15,000 visitors in 2017 and 2018. • Established a strategic plan with the National Museum of the Royal Navy which will position Hartlepool nationally and internationally as a naval and maritime visitor destination with new exhibits arriving over 2018/19 including a World War 2 Rescue Motor Launch (RML 497). • Attracted investment into accelerating the growth of the cultural and creative economy in Hartlepool through the expansion of the Northern School of Art into a new £11m campus and the conversion of the former General Post Office building in Whitby Street into starter business units and workshops for creative enterprises. • Actively promoted Hartlepool’s growing advanced manufacturing and energy production sectors through a new investment prospectus and promotional campaign. • Attracted £19m external investment into delivering new employment opportunities for young people and £6m into employment pathways for unemployed adults. |
|--|

REGENERATING OUR TOWN

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracted £5.5 m external investment to deliver the renewal of Church Street and Church Square as a dynamic focal point and events space in the town. • Secured external investment to improve pedestrian and gateway access across Stockton Street. • Attracted Heritage Lottery investment into improving the townscape and shop fronts in Church Street. • Delivered a £1.3m improvement scheme which enhances Seaton Carew as a seaside destination including the introduction of new outdoor play facilities, a splash pad, the ‘Waves’ sculpture on the promenade and improvements to the Clock Tower and Bus Shelter. • Installed ‘The boy and the bicycle’ sculpture in Church Street at the Transport Interchange. |
|---|

DEVELOPING AND PROMOTING HARTLEPOOL AS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

- Adopted our Local Plan which provides a framework for facilitating the sustainable development of Hartlepool.
- Facilitated the fastest growth in new housing in the Tees Valley.
- Delivered 100 new social housing units including 70 empty homes brought back into use bringing the total number of new social housing in Council ownership up to 267 which over the last 3 years is one of the fastest growth rates in the country.
- Worked in partnership with Thirteen Group to deliver new social housing in the Raby estate and with Placefirst to deliver the Carr and Hopps Street regeneration scheme.
- Agreed a £1.5m Neighbourhood Investment Programme and a £2.4m programme agreed for improving roads and pavements.
- Secured £549,810 of funding for improvements to Rossmere Park.
- Secured supported accommodation for care leavers.
- Established a new joint Police and Council Community Safety Team to co-ordinate efforts to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Created a new Environmental Task Force to strengthen our approach to enforcement and education.
- Undertaken improvements on major routes across the town including A689, Seaton Lane, Elwick Road, Hart Lane and Raby Road, which involved the renewal of over 3,000m of road.
- Introduced new cycleways on the A689, A179 and Brenda Road.
- Completed the multi-award winning Headland Town Wall flood defence scheme.

DEVELOPING NEW SERVICES FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

- Agreed a plan with health partners for improving community based and hospital services which resulted in the new Urgent Care centre at the Hartlepool hospital site and a new award winning Integrated Discharge Team which brings together a range of health and social care professionals to ensure that people experience safe and timely discharge following a hospital stay.
- Launched 3 new Community Hubs in the North, Centre and South of the town.
- Agreed new model for supporting community and voluntary groups.
- Supported the opening of new care homes including Rossmere Park creating additional capacity and choice in the town.
- Integrated the Drugs & Alcohol Recovery Service into wider adults service
- Attracted £280,000 of Sport England funding to widen family participation in sport and leisure activities.
- Opened the award-winning Centre for Independent Living for adults with care

and support needs.

- Launched a new programme for tackling social isolation which includes a befriending network, lunch clubs and project 65.

BUILDING BETTER BEGINNINGS AND BETTER FUTURES FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Judged by Ofsted to be one of the best performing Children's Services in the country with a rating of good overall with outstanding for Looked after Children.
- Supported 82% of schools and 100% of FE Colleges judged as good or outstanding which means that our education improvement programme is well on the way to meeting our target of 100% by 2020.
- Opened the new Centre for Excellence in Creative Arts at the former Northern Lights Academy providing young people with skills pathways in the creative arts.
- Launched a new early help service which meets the health, development and safeguarding needs of children and supports families to deal with problems at the earliest stage.
- Launched a targeted early years campaign - Talk Matters - to help improve children's early literacy skills.
- Established a new Tees Valley Adoption Agency to improve the availability and timescales in the adoption process.
- Established a Young People's Foundation to co-ordinate investment into youth provision in the borough and protected council funded youth provision.
- Invested in a school holiday programme for children and young people providing free swims and a free meal service to tackle the growing problem of 'holiday hunger'.
- Launched a school-based programme for improving the emotional & mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BASED ON INNOVATION AND EFFICIENCY

- Managed a 45% reduction in government funding (£20.9m) whilst protecting essential front line services.
- Increased our use of social media as a key communication tool for providing public information.
- Involved our workforce in helping to shape our vision, values and improve service delivery.
- Launched Firmstep to enable the public to access more Council transactions available online.
- Launched a new workforce development approach and leadership and

management development programme.

- Increased the number of apprentices with 43 new apprentices starting in autumn 2018 and 17 employee apprenticeships for existing staff.
- Launched a new elected member development and induction programme.

Change is in the air... now is a great time to help shape the next phase of our story.

Next steps

We are well on the way to delivering on our commitments made in our three year plan. We have revised our delivery plan to make sure we remain focussed on delivering the change we want to see:

GROWING OUR JOBS, ECONOMY AND SKILLS

- Engage with local businesses to maximise the potential of strategic business parks and enterprise investment programmes to support the growth of business ventures by December 2019.
- Agree a 5 year investment strategy for growing the tourism and visitor economy through a cultural events programme by November 2018.
- Work in partnership with the new Economic & Tourism Forum to launch a programme of enterprise events which promote local businesses and attractions by December 2018.
- Work with local Further and Higher Education providers to increase the availability of higher level skills pathways in key sectors including energy, health & social care and cultural industries by April 2020.
- Increase the apprenticeship and employment opportunities provided by the Council to enhance and promote the opportunities available particularly focusing on care leavers and other vulnerable adults by September 2019.
- Work with the new Economic Regeneration and Tourism Forum to enhance the Council's approach to procurement, increasing spending in the Hartlepool supply chain in Hartlepool by August 2019.
- Work with the local licensed trade to introduce a programme of summer events to help stimulate a vibrant and competitive night-time economy in Church Street and Church Square which is sensitive to the needs of local residents by summer 2019.

REGENERATING OUR TOWN

- Deliver pedestrian improvements and gateway improvements to Stockton Street and the Town Centre to create a sense of arrival by August 2019.
- Complete a linear park on the Waterfront and welcome the ship RML 497 at the National Museum of the Royal Navy by June 2019.
- Deliver the Innovation Skills Quarter including the regeneration of Church Street and Church Square, the development of Film and TV studio and the opening of creative enterprise incubator workspace in the former GPO building - 'the BIS' by April 2020.
- Complete the regeneration of Church Square by December 2019.
- Deliver the Heritage Lottery Fund programme in Church Street including improvements to shop fronts.
- Complete the regeneration of Seaton Carew including new Beach huts and a crazy golf course by April 2019.
- Commence construction of the Waterfront Events space by November 2019.
- Commence construction of the new Waterfront Visitor attraction telling the story of the Royal Navy and Hartlepool's Maritime history by April 2020.
- Commence construction of Hartlepool's western growth corridor/Elwick bypass by September 2019.
- Utilise the Council's enforcement power to tackle problems in relation to derelict buildings.

DEVELOPING AND PROMOTING HARTLEPOOL AS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

- Deliver a housing investment strategy targeted at increasing availability of social housing under Council ownership and bringing empty properties back into use by March 2020.
- Enable the delivery of housing development in accordance with the local plan by March 2019.
- Deliver a £4m neighbourhood and highways investment programme to deliver shopping parades, parks, play sites, road and pavements including King Oswy Drive Shopping Parade by January 2019, Headland Town Square by March 2019 and Rossmere Park by October 2019.
- Promote transport and travel patterns to work in and around Hartlepool through the Hartlepool Active Travel hub by March 2020.
- Resurface route 14 cycle way from Greatham towards Cowpen Bewley by March 2019.
- Resurface local and strategic cycle and walkways routes including Brenda Road to Burn Road, Brenda Road to the A689 and routes around Bishop Cuthbert's green wedge by March 2020.
- Develop an investment strategy for the extension of Stranton Cemetery, including flooding remediation, the Chapel, neighbouring allotments and

Tanfield Horticulture Nursery site by October 2019.

- Create a new memorial wood at Summerhill by November 2018.
- Launch a public education campaign to encourage residents to work with the Council to help look after our environment and neighbourhoods in March 2019.

DEVELOPING NEW SERVICES FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

- Support commissioned providers of adult social care, through implementation of the Care Quality Improvement Programme, to deliver high quality care and support by March 2020.
- Implement a new model for achieving better drug and alcohol recovery rates by September 2020.
- Further develop the Centre for Independent Living to provide a broader range of opportunities for working age adults with care and support needs to live independent and fulfilling lives by December 2019.
- Work with partners to develop a Health and Care Academy that will enhance training and development opportunities for the local health and social care workforce by October 2019.
- Develop a business case and funding strategy for new and improved sport and leisure facilities by March 2020.
- Deliver the £280,000 Sport England funded programme to widen family participation in sport and leisure activities.

BUILDING BETTER BEGINNINGS AND BETTER FUTURES FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Get every school to good or outstanding as measured by OFSTED by December 2019.
- Deliver a programme of support to ensure all schools provide high standards of careers advice and enterprise education by April 2020.
- Deliver school-based social, emotional, and mental health provision for secondary-aged children and young people in Hartlepool by January 2020.
- Deliver development plan to implement new arrangements for the Safeguarding Children's Partnership to work together to protect and safeguard children at risk of harm by January 2019.
- Deliver a new model of support to schools to improve their capacity to help children and young people with SEND at an earlier stage by July 2019.
- Strengthen arrangements for identifying and addressing parental substance misuse, domestic abuse and parental mental ill health so that problems can be addressed at the earliest possible stage.

- Hold launch event promoting the new Centre for Excellence in Creative Arts (CECA) and further develop the offer available.

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BASED ON INNOVATION AND EFFICIENCY

- Develop and deliver a 3 year innovation and efficiency programme in response to reducing resources and increasing service pressures by April 2020.
- Work with our partners to develop a new needs assessment (JSNA) to influence commissioning with a new model agreed by December 2018 and implemented by March 2019.
- Launch a 'report it' app to enable residents to raised concerns with the Council digitally by December 2018.
- Expand the availability and take up of digitally delivered services enabling people to register for e-billing and complete first stage self-referrals / self-assessments online by August 2019.
- Undertake campaigns to increase voter turnout at local elections and reduce the democratic deficit within Hartlepool by March 2020.
- Launch a co-ordinated approach to engaging citizens in becoming actively involved in meeting local needs and shaping the future of their communities by March 2019.
- Deliver a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool by December 2019.

Measuring success

We have reduced the number of indicators we measure to the 30 most important measures - measures that will help us stay focussed on delivering a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive future for Hartlepool:

Growing our economy, jobs and skills	1	Overall employment rate (working age) (%) in Hartlepool
	2	New business registration rate per 10,000 population aged 16 and above
	3	Increase in rateable value in relation to businesses in Hartlepool
	4	Proportion of residents aged 16-24 claiming unemployment related benefits (%)

	5	Percentage of Council spend that goes to local suppliers
	6	Adult literacy / adult skills levels
Regenerating our town	7	Visitor Numbers
	8	Business units - occupancy rates
Developing and promoting Hartlepool as a great place to live	9	Housing Growth - Net additional homes
	10	Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)
	11	Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting in Hartlepool
	12	Overall crime rate per 1,000 head of population
	13	Percentage of residents who are satisfied with their local area as a place to live
Developing new services for people and communities	14	Percentage of commissioned adult social care providers that are rated good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission
	15	Adult social care indicator - Percentage of older people achieving independence for older people through rehabilitation/intermediate care
	16	Proportion of adults in contact with secondary mental health services in paid employment
	17	Proportion of adults in contact with learning disabilities in paid employment
	18	Percentage of those accessing recovery services moving into volunteering or employment
	19	Drugs and alcohol: sustained recovery 6 months after completing treatment
Building better beginnings and better futures for our children and young people	20	Percentage schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted
	21	Education - Proportion of students attaining 5+ A*-C (new grade 4/5 and above) including English and mathematics
	22	Progression to Higher Education / skills age 19

	23	Percentage of 16-17 year olds who are NEET
	24	Pupil attendance at school (analysis by gender and school phase)
	25	Proportion of children in low-income families 0-16
	26	Rate of looked after children per 10,000 population
	27	Immunisation rate for children aged 2 who have been immunised for Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR)
Providing effective leadership based upon innovation and efficiency	28	External Auditor's Assessment of 'value for money' provided by the Council
	29	Percentage total voter turnout at local elections
	30	Percentage of staff who feel satisfied about working for the Council

Equality Objectives 2018-2020

The Council has a legal duty to publish a set of equality objectives in April at least every 4 years. Since the first objectives were published in April 2012 the Council has used the relevant elements of our Council Plan in order to demonstrate that equality is a core part of our work. The equality objectives that have been identified are set out below:

Growing our economy, jobs and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the apprenticeship and employment opportunities provided by the Council to enhance and promote the opportunities available particularly focusing on care leavers and other vulnerable adults by September 2019.
Developing and promoting Hartlepool as a great place to live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a £4m neighbourhood and highways investment programme to deliver shopping parades, parks, play sites, road and pavements including King Oswy Drive Shopping Parade by January 2019, Headland Town Square by March 2019 and Rossmere Park by October 2019.

Developing new services for people and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support commissioned providers of adult social care, through implementation of the Care Quality Improvement Programme, to deliver high quality care and support by March 2020. • Further develop the Centre for Independent Living to provide a broader range of opportunities for working age adults with care and support needs to live independent and fulfilling lives by December 2019.
Building better beginnings and better futures for our children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver school-based social, emotional, and mental health provision for secondary-aged children and young people in Hartlepool by January 2020. • Deliver development plan to implement new arrangements for the Safeguarding Children's Partnership to work together to protect and safeguard children at risk of harm by January 2019. • Deliver a new model of support to schools to improve their capacity to help children and young people with SEND at an earlier stage by July 2019. • Strengthen arrangements for identifying and addressing parental substance misuse, domestic abuse and parental mental ill health so that problems can be addressed at the earliest possible stage.
Providing effective leadership based upon innovation and efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the availability and take up of digitally delivered services enabling people to register for e-billing and complete first stage self-referrals / self-assessments online by August 2019. • Deliver a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool by December 2019.

POVERTY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM**1. Is this decision a Budget & Policy Framework or Key Decision? YES****If YES please answer question 2 below****2. Will there be an impact of the decision requested in respect of Child and Family Poverty? YES****If YES please complete the matrix below**

GROUP	POSITIVE IMPACT	NEGATIVE IMPACT	NO IMPACT	REASON & EVIDENCE
Young working people aged 18 - 21	✓			There is a focus on support from Further and Higher Education providers into high value sustainable employment and also apprenticeship opportunities.
Those who are disabled or suffer from illness / mental illness	✓			There is a focus on supporting working age adults with care and support needs to live independent and fulfilling lives.
Those with low educational attainment	✓			There is a focus on improving educational attainment.
Those who are unemployed	✓			There is a focus on support from Further and Higher Education providers into high value sustainable employment and also apprenticeship opportunities.
Those who are underemployed			✓	
Children born into families in poverty	✓			There is a focus on improving educational attainment and high standards of career advice and enterprise education in all schools.
Those who find difficulty in managing their finances			✓	
Lone parents			✓	
Those from minority ethnic backgrounds			✓	

Poverty is measured in different ways. Will the policy / decision have an impact on child and family poverty and in what way?				
Poverty Measure (examples of poverty measures appended overleaf)	POSITIVE IMPACT	NEGATIVE IMPACT	NO IMPACT	REASON & EVIDENCE
Children in Low Income Families (%)	✓			There is a focus on support from Further and Higher Education providers into high value sustainable employment and also apprenticeship opportunities.
Children in Working Households (%)	✓			There is a focus on support from Further and Higher Education providers into high value sustainable employment and also apprenticeship opportunities.
Overall employment rate (%)	✓			There is a focus on improving skills and employment pathways for unemployed adults and parents.
Proportion of young people who are NEET	✓			There is a focus on support from Further and Higher Education providers into high value sustainable employment, apprenticeship opportunities, on improving educational attainment and high standards of career advice and enterprise education in all schools.
Adults with Learning difficulties in employment	✓			There is a focus on supporting working age adults with care and support needs to live independent and fulfilling lives.
Free School meals attainment gap (key stage 2 and key stage 4)	✓			There is a focus on improving educational attainment.
Gap in progression to higher education FSM / Non FSM	✓			There is a focus on improving educational attainment.
Achievement gap between	✓			There is a focus on

disadvantaged pupils and all pupils (key stage 2 and key stage 4)				improving educational attainment.
Number of affordable homes built	✓			There is a focus on providing affordable and social housing.
Prevalence of obese children in reception year	✓			There is a focus on encouraging health lifestyles and participation in sport and leisure.
Prevalence of obese children in reception year 6	✓			There is a focus on encouraging health lifestyles and participation in sport and leisure.
Life expectancy	✓			There is a focus on encouraging health lifestyles and participation in sport and leisure.
Overall impact of Policy / Decision				
POSITIVE IMPACT	✓	ADJUST / CHANGE POLICY / SERVICE		
NO IMPACT / NO CHANGE		STOP / REMOVE POLICY / SERVICE		
ADVERSE IMPACT BUT CONTINUE				

Equality Impact Assessment Form

Department	Division	Section	Owner/Officer
All	N/A	N/A	Catherine Grimwood
Service, policy, practice being reviewed/changed or planned	Council Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20		
Why are you making the change?	Mid-term review of the Council Plan – updating to reflect what's been delivered, what has changed and the new priorities that have emerged since the original Plan was approved in March 2017.		
How might this impact (positively/negatively) on people who share protected characteristics?			
<i>Please tick</i>		POSITIVELY	NEGATIVELY
Age		✓	
There is focus in the Council plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting young unemployed people into work or apprenticeships. • Improving skills and employment pathways for unemployed adults and parents. • Improving health and care support for older people. 			
Disability		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving health and care support and housing options for people with disabilities. • Improving arrangements for those with Special Education Needs (SEND). • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Gender Re-assignment		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Race		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Religion		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Gender		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Sexual Orientation		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Marriage & Civil Partnership		✓	
There is a focus in the Council Plan on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering a programme of staff training and awareness events to improve understanding of different groups and communities within Hartlepool. 			
Pregnancy & Maternity			
Not directly			

Has there been consultation /is consultation planned with people who will be affected by this policy? How has this affected your decision making?		The priorities identified in the proposed Council Plan have been informed by the Council's Your Say, Our Future exercise that took place over summer 2016. Some of the proposals within the Council Plan may be subject to specific consultation prior to implementation.	
As a result of your decision how can you mitigate negative/maximise positive outcomes and foster good relationships?		The aim of the Council Plan overall is to improve outcomes across a range of themes across Hartlepool. Changes to individual services which are included within the Council Plan will be subject to their own Equality Impact Assessments.	
Describe how you will address and monitor the impact		1. No Impact - No Major Change Overall there should be a positive impact across Hartlepool including all equality groups.	
		2. Adjust/Change Policy	
		3. Adverse Impact but Continue as is	
		4. Stop/Remove Policy/Proposal	
Initial Assessment	31/1/17	Reviewed	9/10/18
Completed		Published	

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

29th October 2018



Report of: Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods

Subject: **STIMULATING THE VISITOR ECONOMY – 5 YEAR FUNDING STRATEGY**

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Key Decision (test (i)/(ii)) General Exception Provision apply.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To seek endorsement to release the Civic Lottery Fund to support the delivery of the Council's cultural events programme.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 It is commonly understood that well organised cultural events create economic benefits and attract visitors, which stimulates the growth of tourism and other businesses in the local area. The social benefits of cultural events are less visible, but they are just as important. Besides being fun, well-managed events offer a host of economic and social benefits and increased cohesion to communities.

3.2 Events attract visitors and visitors spend money, which boosts the local economy both on and off the event site. Events also provide free marketing and advertising for local businesses as visitors talk about their experiences of Hartlepool when they go home. This is evidenced in some specific case studies as set out in background papers of this report.

3.3 There are currently three main categories of events in Hartlepool that the Council have a direct involvement:

- (1) **HBC Events.** These are the large-scale event such as the Fireworks and the Christmas Light Switch On. Both of these events are organised by the Culture and Events Team, the main purpose is to drive tourism, regeneration and to support business in the Borough.

- (2) **HBC Supported Events.** The second type of events, supported by the Community Safety and Engagement Team are community-based events aimed at promoting community involvement and cohesion. Many of these events are held in the community supporting resident groups' occurring on an ad hoc basis whilst some take place annually.
- (3) **Private Events.** In addition to this there are events that are operated by external bodies and individuals that the Council may or may not have an involvement e.g. Wintertide Festival, Miles for Men and Race for Life.
- 3.4 Cultural Services currently employ one Events officer whom is supported by the rest of the Culture team during peak times in the programme, due to the Council's ambitions in relation to regeneration and events playing a strong role in changing the perception of Hartlepool, this approach is no longer sustainable.
- 3.5 Further Council support is provided in the shape of the Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG) for all events that the Council is made aware of. The group offers advice to event organisers on issues including: medical & healthcare facilities required, security, health & safety, mitigating hostile vehicles and any specific issues with infrastructure on the site and hazards such as water. ISAG comprises the following Council officers and key external stakeholders:
- HBC Culture, Public Protection, Traffic & Transport, Building Control, Planning, Community Safety, Licensing, Building Design Consultancy, Engineers, Emergency Planning Unit and Health & Safety.
 - Cleveland Police
 - Cleveland Fire Authority
 - Ambulance Service
- The Assistant Director for Corporate Services now has responsibility for the chairing and management of the group by April 2018.
- 3.6 Notwithstanding budget constraints the current events budget delivers the current and proposed programme and has historically been utilised to fund the horticulture show, which prior to this year has been held in the Town Hall. The Economic Growth team have also supported the Wintertide Festival supporting small businesses, encouraging tourism to Hartlepool contributing officer time and a small revenue contribution towards the event.
- 3.7 In addition the Department of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods has incurred costs associated with supporting the events programme free of charge, officers assisting on the day and receiving overtime in payment and/or lieu time. The Department is unable to continue providing this support without impacting upon the income targets set as part of the MTFS.

- 3.8 The previous sponsorship arrangement for the Fireworks display and the Christmas light switch on has ceased and the sponsor is no longer able to support these events, which has seen a loss of £25,000 per annum to the Council.
- 3.9 The Tees Valley Combined Authority recognise Hartlepool's maritime history which is identified as one of the priorities within their Cultural strategy. TVCA have agreed a £10M Culture and Tourism Investment programme for the region which will focus on the development of four areas of activity:
- Heritage and Attraction asset capital development
 - Festivals and events
 - Building cultural capacity
 - Destination marketing

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The Cultural Services team delivers an existing events programme which will be expanded over the next 5 years.
- 4.2 Along with the organising and funding of events, the development of a marketing strategy and action plan and additional staff resource is essential. The marketing strategy will embrace and utilise the emerging "Destination / Invest in Hartlepool" brand and additional funding and staff resources will be required. The Councils Communication and Marketing section will play a key role in this.
- 4.3 The current Events budget is insufficient and events are reliant upon external grants from organisations such as the Arts Council, Heritage Lottery Fund or the Tees Valley Combined Authority, and / or sponsorship. As appropriate external funding cannot be relied upon over the next 5 years, the Council must therefore identify additional funding sources to grow the events programme alongside our ambitions. The proposed additional funding is set out in section 6 of this report.
- 4.4 A key component of the funding package is the use of the Civic Lottery Fund capital which is currently £412K. Historically the Council has held the capital in trust and only utilised the interest; as previously use was restricted by the Secretary of State. This fund will be used to contribute towards staff costs and the delivery of the events programme over the next 5 years.

5. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Not identifying additional funding required to deliver the service would put at risk the delivery of the Cultural Services and Events programme over the next 5 years.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Going forward over the next 5 years the use of the Civic Lottery Fund will contribute towards staffing costs and the delivery of the events programme.
- 6.2 The Council has recognised that for Hartlepool to continue to grow in terms of its visitor attractions, there is a need to invest in the current events programme as part of its regeneration ambition. As such external funding sources to support the programme are required. Officers have been encouraged by the Arts Councils to submit grant applications and TVCA have intimated they will continue to support the growth of the Waterfront Festival funding artistic and cultural acts to the same sum as previous years.
- 6.3 The Council currently does not have a coordinated approach to seeking sponsorship from local businesses which can cause difficulties for officers and provides a confusing message to businesses. The Council is currently developing a corporate sponsorship offer to local businesses which will offer a suite of packages to businesses including signs, events, roundabouts etc. depending upon the nature and size of the sponsorship package required. This however is still being developed and as a result cannot be relied upon to provide a dedicated external funding source in the short term.
- 6.4 The Civic Lottery Fund, together with grants from the Arts Council and TVCA along with the current revenue budget will allow for the delivery of the Cultural Services remit and specifically the events programme going forward. Whilst there is a projected positive balance each year this will allow for an element of contingency in the overall events budget to allow for unforeseen circumstances and other pressures (e.g. unplanned reduced funding from external organisations such as Arts Council/TVCA). In the event that external funding is reduced officers will scale the specific event affected to meet the revised budget envelope.
- 6.5 A key component of the funding package is the use of the Civic Lottery Fund capital which is currently to the value of approximately £412k. Historically the Council has held the capital in trust and only utilised the interest; as previously use was restricted by the Secretary of State. In previous years the interest was used to “top-up” the existing ward member budgets by £500 per Member; going forward it is proposed to utilise the capital and as a result there will be no interest available for this use going forward. As the Civic Lottery Fund will be used on a phased basis commencing in 2018/19 this will provide Ward Member Budget top-ups of £300 in 2019/20 and £200 in 2020/21. Thereafter there will be no further Ward Member Budget top-ups.

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 In 1977 Hartlepool Borough Council set up and promoted a Local Lottery pursuant to section 6 of The Lotteries and Amusements Act 1986. A Civic Lottery Fund was established with the original objective being to raise

monies for leisure, recreational or environmental projects. The Civic Lottery was promoted until 1982 and as we understand it restrictions apply to any expenditure of the capital reserve without specific Secretary of State approval.

- 7.2 In 1989 the Secretary of State approved an amendment to the Civic Lottery, to include the provision of grants to local charitable organisations. Approval was also provided to allow for an increase in the maximum amount that could be awarded from £500 to £2,000 to any one beneficiary.
- 7.3 The Civic Lottery Grants Fund is composed of annual interest earned from the capital investment. Interest is credited to this fund using either the interest rate earned on the Council's investments, or the average interest rate paid on the Council's long term borrowings, whichever is the highest.
- 7.4 Due to the decline in interest in these grants as well as the increasing costs in administering them, the Legal Division were instructed to identify whether there was any way the Civic Lottery could be closed, to enable the capital to be used to fund future community events. Such events would concur with the original aim of the Lottery and 'have benefit across the town for a large number of citizens'.
- 7.5 The legislation governing the Civic Lottery, The Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976 (the Act) has been repealed. Under section 7 (4) of this Act the Secretary of State's consent was required to close down a lottery.
- 7.6 The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has been consulted and has confirmed that the provisions under section 7(4) of the Act requiring the Secretary of States' consent to closure of the lottery has not been re-enacted in subsequent legislation and consent is therefore not required.

8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

- 8.1 There are no child and family poverty implications relating to this report.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations relating to this report.

10. SECTION 17 OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998 CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no Section 17 considerations relating to this report.

11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 In order to deliver the Culture & Events programme over the next five years there will be some changes required to the current structure in terms of changes to existing staff responsibilities, These will be delivered by amendments to working hours and existing job descriptions and done so in accordance with the job evaluation process.
- 11.2 The proposed restructure will not result in any compulsory redundancies and informal communication will be undertaken with Trade Unions and staff regarding the staffing implications as a consequence of this proposal being accepted. Formal consultation with staff and Trade unions will be carried out in line with Council policy.

12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations relating to this report as the assets and buildings currently utilised by Cultural Services are not proposed to be changed.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 It is recommended that Members:
- i. As part of the MTFS proposals to be referred to Council in December 2018 seek approval to use the Civic Lottery Fund to support the delivery of the culture and events programme.
 - ii. Note the Phased reduction of the Ward Member Budget top-ups as detailed in paragraph 6.7.

14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 To implement the changes required to effectively deliver the Council's Cultural Services offer going forward over the next 5 years.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 It is commonly understood that well organised cultural events create economic benefits and attract visitors, which stimulates the growth of tourism and other businesses in the local area. The following website links give an insight into the positive benefits of cultural events:

University of Hull study on impact of the Capital of Culture:

- <http://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/more/media-centre/news/2018/city-of-culture-evaluation.aspx>

Local Government Association:

- https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.3%20-%20culture%20and%20place_v4_1_1.pdf

Arts Council:

- <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160204164017/http://www.arts council.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications/phpRc7nbQ.pdf>

Durham County Council Lumiere Impact:

- <http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/7848/Lumiere-festival-delivers-biggest-ever-economic-impact->

16. CONTACT OFFICER

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FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

29 October 2018



Report of: Assistant Director, Corporate Services

Subject: EMPLOYEE SICKNESS ABSENCE
ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

1.0 TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

Non Key Decision.

2.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Finance and Policy Committee of the Council's performance in relation to employee sickness absence for 2017/18 and to outline a proposed strategy to reduce sickness levels.

3.0 HBC SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE AND MANAGER'S GUIDE

- 3.1 HBC have a Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure and Manager's Guide in place which provides the framework for managers to support the management of sickness absence, as well as supporting absent employees in their return to work, through a consistent and fair approach. The policy, procedure and guide provide guidance on a range of areas including short, medium and long term sickness and the process for managing each type of sick episode, documentation required, referrals to occupational health and other tools available to managers, advice on fit notes and implication of GPs advice, including phased returns to work and support in dealing with stress related episodes. These are supported by training which is delivered by experienced HR staff. Advice and guidance for managers to appropriately manage sickness absence is available from the Human Resources Service.

4.0 LONG TERM SICKNESS (LTS)

- 4.1 HBC has an ageing but committed workforce. Approximately 25% of the workforce are aged 55 or over and the number of young people in the workforce is comparatively low. An ageing workforce may present significant challenges in respect of age related health and wellbeing and the ageing process may lead to a range of unavoidable complex illnesses and conditions. An ageing workforce represents a key driver for the sickness trend in HBC in 2017/18.
- 4.2 In the reporting year, LTS comprised 70% of the total sickness for the Council (7.74 days per FTE) and was attributable to complex, serious conditions such as cancer, surgery and recovery, poor mental health and musculo-skeletal conditions. This is line with national trends, as reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD).
- 4.3 70% of the total sickness for HBC was accrued by 277 employees - representing approximately 12% of the workforce.
- 4.4 Repeat absences were low and of those employees that were absent with a LTS episode in the reporting year, 70% were off once, and for a period of less than 3 months.
- 4.5 It can be seen that in Hartlepool, Short and Medium Term sickness is the second lowest in the Tees Valley and is also lower when comparing with 2 other North East Public Sector organisations.

Organisation	Short and Medium Sickness as a % of the total sickness	LTS as a % of total sickness
Hartlepool	30.7%	69.3%
Tees Valley 1	47.7%	52.3%
Tees Valley 2	35.2%	64.8%
Tees Valley 3	36.1%	63.9%
Tees Valley 4	28.2%	71.8%
NE 1	40.0%	60%
NE 2	40.0%	60%

- 4.6 HBC is a supportive employer and provides a range of flexible solutions to support employees back to work who are on long term sick. The Council focuses on the management of LTS through prevention, early intervention and proactive strategies to support the employee to return to work. This includes measures such as home visits, phased return, temporary or permanent movement of work role/duties, amended/flexible hours, aids and adaptations and ongoing support such as physiotherapy and counselling (where appropriate). Occupational Health are fully involved in each case of LTS.

- 4.7 The strategy for a reduction in the sickness absence of the Council should focus on providing staff with the skills and tools to stay healthier for longer through a preventative approach. This will largely be focused on providing staff with a Core Offer to support their health and wellbeing. This is detailed in the action plan in section 6.

5.0 SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM SICKNESS (STS)

- 5.1 ST and MT sickness for HBC accounted for approximately 30% of sickness absence in 2017/18 (3.31 days per full time employee). The main causes were minor illness, musculo-skeletal and domestic stress which is in line with the national trend, as reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD).
- 5.2 Managers are supported to address all sickness, including a concerted effort to manage ST and MT sickness. In recent years, the level of ST and MT sickness has fallen.

6.0 STRATEGY TO IMPROVE THE SICKNESS ABSENCE RATE FOR 2018/19

- 6.1 Whilst there are a number of proactive and preventative actions already in place, the Council must look to further actions that support a reduction in the sickness absence rate. This should include the continuation of the range of activities already undertaken by the Council, together with the following 4 new actions:

Key Deliverable	By When	By Whom
<p>Develop and implement a Health and Wellbeing Offer for employees, including universal and targeted interventions.</p> <p>The Offer includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of health and wellbeing champions into the workplace. • 'Take the Time to'.... Campaigns. • Taster Sessions across a range of activities. • Making a Pledge to improve wellness. • Musculo-skeletal support such as 	November 2018	<p>Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services</p> <p>Assistant Director, Corporate Services</p>

<p>Backcare Clinics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch co-ordinated activity for World Mental Health week (w/c 8 October) 		
<p>Ensure managers are well supported in their role to effectively manage LTS including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development and implementation of an electronic system to improve access to sickness information to be able to monitor and manage sickness absence easily and quickly. Regular briefings and training on sickness absence management and supporting managers with mental health related sickness absence or potential sickness absence. Where appropriate, HR presence and support at departmental meetings 	December 2018	<p>Resourcelink Strategy Group</p> <p>HR Service</p>
<p>Review the sickness absence policy, procedure and manager's guide.</p>	March 2019	HR Service
<p>Undertake visits to neighboring authorities who have achieved good performance in sickness absence management.</p>	December 2018	<p>Assistant Director, Corporate Services</p> <p>HR Business Partner</p>

7.0 PROPOSED SICKNESS ABSENCE TARGET 2018/19

- 7.1 It is proposed that the sickness target remains at the same level as 2017/18 (8.5 days) which demonstrates ambition and a continued commitment to the reduction of the sickness absence rate.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Despite a concerted effort by the Council to implement proactive and preventative approaches to sickness absence and a flexible and supportive approach to return to work options, the sickness rate remains above target.
- 8.2 The Council has an ageing workforce with over 25% of employees aged 55 or over. An ageing workforce may bring specific and unavoidable health and wellbeing challenges, which all local authorities face.
- 8.3 The main contributor to the council's sickness absence is Long Term Sickness (LTS) absence, accounting for 70% of the sickness absence in the Council. The main reasons for LTS in the Council are Musculo-Skeletal Injury, Surgery/recovery, Domestic Stress and Mental Illness. A high number of these are aligned to an ageing workforce. A continued focus on these areas is essential to make a positive impact on the overall sickness absence rate for the Council. In comparison with other public sector organisations in the region, it can be seen that Hartlepool Borough Council has a higher percentage of sickness absence as long term.
- 8.4 The additional actions for reducing sickness absence in 2018/19 takes a whole Council preventative and supportive approach to positive health and wellbeing which is imperative to make a significant impact on the sickness rate. It is important to remain ambitious, and therefore it is proposed that the targets remain at the current level.

9.0 RISK IMPLICATIONS

If sickness absence continues to increase then this may impact on the ability for the Council to deliver key services to an acceptable level.

10.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct specific financial considerations from this report. However, sickness generally and specifically LTS costs the Council in lost productivity and in some areas additional cover costs are incurred, which need to be funded from existing budgets.

11.0 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no specific legal considerations from this report.

12.0 CHILD/FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

There are no specific child / family poverty considerations from this report.

13.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

There are no specific equality / diversity considerations from this report.

14.0 STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

There are no specific staffing considerations from this report other than those highlighted in the body of the report.

15.0 ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

There are no specific asset management considerations from this report.

16.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee considers the information presented and approves that the 2018/19 sickness absence target remains at 8.5 days and approves the actions proposed to reduce sickness absence in 2018/19.

17.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the current sickness absence rate and remain ambitious for the year ahead.

18.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

19.0 CONTACT OFFICER

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FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

29th October 2018



Report of: Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Subject: UPDATED LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT
FRAMEWORK

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

Non key

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To advise Members of proposed updates to the Local Welfare Support (LWS) framework.
- 2.2 To confirm Local Welfare Support arrangements with Hartlepool Foodbank.
- 2.2 To seek approval of the updated framework.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Local Welfare Support includes 'in crisis' and 'non crisis' requests for support from vulnerable residents in Hartlepool. Awards are made subject to applicants meeting agreed eligibility criteria.
- 3.2 'In crisis' support involves a resident coming into the Civic Centre to access food, energy top ups, vouchers and/ or other help.
- 3.3 'Non crisis' support involves a resident completing an application form for essential goods that will help them settle into the community for example carpets, beds, white goods and/ or kitchen equipment.
- 3.4 The council must deliver a welfare support service however the funding it makes available and the way it is delivered are at our discretion.
- 3.5 A framework was established when the scheme first started and set the criteria and parameters in which officers can make an award.

- 3.6 Members approved the last framework in 2015/16 and there have been no significant changes since this date.

4. WELFARE SUPPORT

- 4.1 LWS sits within The Children's Hub and is delivered by a team of Welfare Support Officers. Officers use their benefit, entitlement and voluntary sector/ service sector knowledge to help vulnerable residents who ask for help.
- 4.2 Officers have a number of 'tools' that can help them support residents and their work directly supports the council's Child and Family Poverty Strategy with the aim of mitigating impact of poverty on children, young people and their families.
- 4.3 The Officer 'toolkit' includes LWS, Discretionary Housing Payments, the Greggs Foundation grant, the Trussell Trust Foodbank and the wider food network, school uniform schemes and other forms of local support to ensure residents gets the help they need. In many cases an LWS award does not need to be made as another service / provider can and will help.

5. LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT SCHEME

- 5.1 During 2017/18 £189,112 was allocated to the scheme and £162,336 was spent. Despite the continuing cuts in Government funding the Medium Term Financial Strategy has continued to protected the real term value of the LWS budget as this forms an integral part of the Council's strategy to help partly mitigated the impact of national welfare changes. The other major component of this strategy is the Local Council Tax Support scheme, which continues to provide more support than in the other Tees Valley Authorities. The budget allocated for 2018/19 is £193,618 and £182,310 has been spent/ committed already. This is due to an increased pressures for families and individuals in relation to Universal Credit. The proposed LWS budget for 2019/20 is £198,458.

LWS activity for 2017/18 was as follows:

	Total number of LWS 'in crisis' applications received – eg food/ energy top ups etc	Total number of LWS 'non crisis' applications received – eg white goods, beds etc	Total number of applications for 'in crisis' and 'non crisis'	Total number of LWS applications approved
April	214	127	341	87
May	170	145	315	82
June	193	112	305	67
July	153	93	246	65
August	206	86	292	65
Sept	191	73	264	57
Oct	214	110	324	58

Nov	199	115	314	71
Dec	161	72	233	61
Jan	200	97	297	63
Feb	199	79	278	45
March	224	99	323	72
Total	2324	1208	3532	793

This data is actual requests for an LWS award. This includes requests for shopping vouchers, energy top ups and furniture. It excludes Foodbank referrals, school uniform and signposting to other service providers who can help.

5.2. 2018/19 has seen unprecedented demand placed upon the Local Welfare Support Scheme with a significant rise in the number of service users asking for help. This can be directly attributed to Universal Credit (service users unable to manage on a monthly payment scheme) and also sanctions (penalties on benefit/ UC for non-engagement).

5.3 **Appendix A** includes the proposed revised LWS Framework 2018/19. This has been updated to include the following changes:

- Uplifts to the value of the awards that can be made for gas, electricity and food/ toiletries (p6 and p7). This is the first proposed uplift since 2015/16 and reflects rises in the general cost of living.
- A spring/summer and autumn/ winter differentiated personal allowance with more generous awards during the autumn/ winter period (p6 and p7) when increased energy costs and the need for hot, cooked food are greater.

6. HARTLEPOOL FOODBANK

6.1 The Local Welfare Support Scheme currently makes an annual payment of £8,000 to the Trussell Trust Foodbank to support service users referred by the local authority suffering food poverty.

6.2 Hartlepool Borough Council is the single biggest referring agency to the Foodbank and awards of vouchers by the LA are now in excess of 40 per week.

6.3 The £8,000 provided by the local authority equates to less than £4 per head per individual we refer yet the foodbank provides food at cost of between £15 and £25 per voucher redeemed including other dependent adults and children. Of late, the Foodbank has struggled to achieve the public donations that it has had in the past. Help has been provided to the trustees by the Head of Service with advice on a fundraising strategy and to alternative sources of grants and funding.

6.4 As requested by the Chair of Finance and Policy Committee it is proposed to increase the award from the Local Welfare Support scheme from £8,000 to

£10,000 per annum from 2019/20 subject to affordability and budget availability.

7. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There is a risk that the amount of funding allocated by the council to the LWS scheme is not sufficient to meet demand. Officers and managers monitor the fund carefully and to date there has not been an overspend despite an increase in demand. The role of the Welfare Support Officer includes the need to identify alternative sources of support where residents can be referred to. The knowledge and use of such services enables the LWS budget to be targeted at those that need it most.

8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 It is a statutory duty to deliver an LWS fund however it is in the council's discretion how much is allocated and how this is done. It is important that it is administered fairly and consistently and according to the framework in order to ensure there are no legal challenges to an officer's decision making.

9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

- 9.1 LWS forms a significant part of the council's Child and Family Poverty Strategy. The fund offers applicants important welfare assistance and the opportunity to access daily living support.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 The Welfare Support team is committed to promoting a community and organisational culture that fully respects and values everyone's differences and needs.

11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations.

12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 That Members approve the revised Local Welfare Support Administration Framework 2018 /19.
- 13.2 That Members approve an increase from £8,000 to £10,000 from the LWS fund to the Foodbank.

14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 The framework includes relevant updates to ensure the council is compliant with its legal duties.
- 14.2 The framework has been updated to reflect local need and rises in the cost of living.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Welfare Support Administration Framework 2018/19.

16. CONTACT OFFICER

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Local Welfare Support Administration Framework

2018/19



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Purpose

The purpose of this administration framework is to specify how Hartlepool Borough Council's Children's Hub operates the Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS) and outlines the framework within which award determinations are made. Each case is treated strictly on its merits and all applicants receive equal and fair treatment within a transparent process taking full account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant government legislation. The fund is administered by the Welfare Support team within The Children's Hub.

Considerations for an award

The Welfare Support team will consider making an award from the LWSS to those applicants that are living in Hartlepool who meet the qualifying criteria as specified in this policy.

There are two strands to the LWSS that will be considered when assessing applications:

- Awards for those who present to the Council in immediate crisis;
- Awards for those who are residents of Hartlepool, not in immediate crisis but need help.

'In Crisis'

These awards cover scenarios where, due to a crisis, there is a severe risk to the health and safety of the applicant or an immediate family member or dependent which cannot be dealt with via other support mechanisms. Payments may be made to cover the following risks:

- No access to essential needs;
- Imminent deterioration in health.

A crisis could also be an event of great or sudden misfortune such as major flooding, gas explosion or a house fire but it is not expected that a minor mishap or damage or failure of a household item would be deemed a crisis in most circumstances.

'Non Crisis'

Applicants may receive a LWSS Award if they are receiving Income Support, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance, any type of Pension Credit or any relevant elements of Universal Credit. In some circumstances an applicant may be working but able to demonstrate that they have no income with which to pay for the required goods/ services themselves.

Applicants may be able to access a LWSS award if they are leaving accommodation in which they received significant and substantial care and supervision and they expect to be discharged within 6 weeks. These applicants will not have a current tenancy or be a home owner and will need to find somewhere to live in the community. Such applicants must also be expected to receive a “passported” benefit (as set out in 2.4.1) or a relevant element of Universal Credit when they leave the accommodation. Examples of such accommodation that would fit this criteria are:

- Prison or detention centre
- Hospital or other medical establishment
- Care home
- Hostel
- Staff intensive sheltered housing
- Supported living accommodation
- Local authority care.

LWSS awards are not routinely made to residents moving from one tenancy to another except in exceptional circumstances. A LWSS award may be made if this will help an individual to stay at home in the community rather than move into residential care or hospital. One of the factors considered is how immediate the likelihood is of going into such accommodation and whether the type of item or service required would prevent this happening. Some examples are:

- Help with expenses to maintain independent living where no other funds are available to meet this need e.g. moving from a furnished flat to an unfurnished one
- Help to move to a more suitable place to live or to be nearer someone who will provide care and support.

Applicants will be signposted to other advice providers such as West View Advice and Resource Centre. In addition, details of any other potential sources of funding will be provided to the applicant where appropriate.

LWSS awards may be made to support a family facing exceptional pressure. Some examples of situations that may give rise to exceptional pressure are:

- The family suffers an income and cashflow crisis (e.g. the main person in the family that receives benefits dies or moves out or is taken into prison or is benefit sanctioned;
- Someone in the family suffers from a disability or chronic illness which gives rise to an exceptional need;
- There is, or has been, a breakdown of relationships within the family (e.g. a relationship ends, couple separate due to domestic violence) and a change in benefit income ensues;

- There is a serious problem with the accommodation (e.g. overcrowding/structural problems);
- Domestic upheaval because of unforeseen circumstances such as house fire, flooding or other disaster.

The above is not an exhaustive list and officers needs to work within the parameters of 'exceptional pressure'.

What causes exceptional pressure can cover a very wide range of personal circumstances. When considering applications, assessors will look at all the factors causing pressures on the family and will decide:

- Whether any of them individually or collectively when looked at as a whole, constitute exceptional pressure, and;
- If so, whether the items applied for will ease that exceptional pressure.

LWSS payments will also enable the Council to provide support for vulnerable people in financial crisis. The Welfare Support team will treat all applications on an individual basis. When making a decision on any application, consideration will be given to the following priorities:

- Safeguard Hartlepool residents in their homes
- Help those who are trying to help themselves
- Keep families together
- Help provide stability to children
- Support the vulnerable in the local community
- Help applicants through personal crisis and difficult events.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances applications from single people (non dependants) living with other family members will not be awarded as they are likely to have access to support from other family members.

Where a professional is involved with the person (e.g. a Social Worker, Family Support Worker, Mental Health Worker) the Welfare Support team will liaise with them to ensure an appropriate decision on an award of LWS is made. If an award is not made the team will support the professional to source alternative opportunities.

Hartlepool Foodbank

The Trussell Trust and Hartlepool Churches Together operate a foodbank from Church Street two days a week. The Welfare Support team refers appropriate people to the

foodbank and is currently the largest referrer in the town. On average some 50+ referrals are made a week by the team for vulnerable single people and families with dependent children. When someone contacts the team in a food crisis a discussion takes place to determine if a foodbank referral is appropriate. Given LWSS reliance on the foodbank, funding is offered from the LWSS budget to the Hartlepool FoodBank each year to support a contribution to the cost of such referrals. Information is also shared on other services of 'free' food available across the town where appropriate. Officers have access to information which clearly explains the location of free food throughout the week for vulnerable people and will direct service users to this where appropriate.

In Crisis support and allowances

Forms of support

Awards will be made for the provision of:

- Food and essential toiletries (via a voucher/prepaid card/food parcel)
- Essential clothing and nappies (via a voucher/prepaid card)
- Heating (via payment to a pre-payment meter)
- Reconnection (via a payment direct to the supplier)
- Travel (bus voucher/ticket) where no reimbursement is available from any other source
- Other forms of support in exceptional circumstances.

Award values

Allowances available are as follows –

Personal Allowance: Spring/Summer*	Gas	Electric	Food & Toiletries
Single person	£10-15	£10-15	£5-25
Couple	£10-20	£10-20	£10-30
Couple with 1 child	+ £7	+ £7	+ £10
Couple with 2 children	+ £7	+ £7	+ £10
Couple with 3 children or more	+ £7	+ £7	+ £10
Baby Essentials Under 2 Yrs (if needed in relation to nappies)	+ £7	+ £7	+ £20

* Depending on weather conditions

Personal Allowance: Autumn/Winter*	Gas	Electric	Food & Toiletries
Single person	£20-25	£20-25	£10-30
Couple	£20-30	£20-30	£10-30
Couple with 1 child	+£10	+£10	+ £10
Couple with 2 children	+£10	+£10	+ £10
Couple with 3 children or more	+£10	+£10	+ £10
Baby Essentials Under 2 Yrs (if needed in relation to nappies)	+ £7	+ £7	+ £20

* Depending on weather conditions

Period of awards will be considered dependant on an applicants' individual financial status. Awards will vary in time and length depending on the benefit they have applied for/ are receiving. In general, applicants will receive an award relevant to the individual crisis. The applicant must show genuine crisis and not an ongoing problem. The Welfare Officer will determine any such awards using the parameters of the framework.

Applicants making repeat applications for crisis awards will be signposted to relevant advice services, generally at the point of making a second application.

Non crisis support and award values

Forms of support

The Welfare Support team continues to use approved suppliers for new equipment and items for the Non Crisis scheme. An option of 'nearly new' is also available. Awards may be made for the provision of:

- Beds and bedding
- Cooking utensils, basic kitchen equipment, including microwave
- Chair/seating
- White goods – cooker, fridge freezer, washing machine and the connection thereof
- Carpets
- Exceptional requests for alternative items can be considered.

In addition service users may be offered the opportunity to purchase second hand items from charity organisations such as The British Heart Foundation Store. Stores such as the British Heart Foundation support Crisis Schemes for Local Authorities throughout the country and offer a low cost alternative to essential household items. Such items will be clean, in new/ nearly new condition and include a guarantee. This may allow an award made to a service user to be 'stretched' in order for them to acquire more items than if they chose new.

Award values

Award values will be at the discretion of the Council but will be based on standard prices for items required including the cost of delivery and installation.

It is expected that typically an award value will not exceed £650. There may be exceptions when a higher award needs to be made. Such exceptions will be agreed by a Senior Officer and usually be accompanied by a supporting statement from a professional working with the person/ family (e.g. Social Worker).

Claiming a crisis award

Applications for an in crisis award will normally be by telephone or drop in to the Civic Centre. A dedicated telephone line is available during normal office hours. The Welfare Support team relies on the availability of the cash office to provide service users with payments and for this reason welfare support is available as follows:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 9am to 4pm
Thursday 10am to 4pm (due to staff training)
Friday 9am to 3.30pm

Usually an officer will complete an application over the phone confirming if the applicant is eligible and if so, the amount to be awarded. If successful, the applicant will be able to collect the relevant crisis award from cash office at the Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool TS24 8AY as soon as is reasonably practicable, and wherever possible on the same day.

Where the officer decides that an interview is required to clarify and validate information the applicant will be offered an appointment, arranged as soon as is reasonably practicable, giving due consideration to the reason for the application.

Where an applicant cannot visit the Civic Centre due to health/mobility issues and cannot use a telephone and has no one else who can act on their behalf an officer may make arrangements to visit the applicant in their home.

The Welfare Support team will also consider crisis applications submitted by key service providers and professionals who act on behalf of individuals. Such applications are to be

made with the individual's explicit consent. Providers may include Social Workers, Mental Health Workers, The Women's Refuge, Homeless Hostels and Independent Living providers. The team will take into consideration any information provided by key service providers in support of applications.

Claiming a non crisis award

Application made direct by applicant

- Applicant completes and submits LWSS application form
- Officer reviews application
 - If the application is fully complete the officer will aim to write to the applicant within 14 days with a decision
 - If the application is incomplete the officer will contact the applicant for further information. Once all relevant data has been collected the team will contact the applicant with a decision by post
 - If successful, awards will be provided in line with the applicants needs.

A letter will be sent within 2 working days of the decision date, to explain the decision to both successful and unsuccessful applicants together with the reconsideration process where appropriate.

Application via key services provider

Key service providers are identified in paragraph 5.7. The following referral process will be used:

- Applicant presents to key service providers
- Service provider identifies that applicant may be eligible for LWSS award
- Service provider supports applicant to complete LWSS award application and forwards it to the Welfare Support team together with relevant supporting evidence
- Officer considers the application and makes a decision within 14 days
- If successful, awards will be provided in line with the applicants needs
- A letter will be sent within 2 working days of the decision date to explain the decision to both successful and unsuccessful applicants together with the review process where relevant.

General

The Welfare Support team may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application for a LWSS award. The applicant will be asked to provide the evidence within 7 days of a request being made although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances.

The team reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the applicant in appropriate circumstances. Any such request will be essential to the decision making process and will only be used in connection with the LWSS application. If the applicant is unable to provide evidence due to the nature of an 'In Crisis' application the team may still consider the application and will take into account any other available information. The team also reserves the right to close applications where evidence available to the applicant has been requested and not supplied.

The team will seek to maximise the applicant's income by checking the availability of state benefits and other sources of financial assistance that may be available to the service users upon application.

The team will offer support to those most vulnerable. This may include the offer of early intervention, referral for social care assessment (adult or children's), referral to other agencies including the voluntary sector for appropriate services. All will be undertaken with explicit consent.

Awarding a payment

Crisis

The officer will consider the full circumstances before deciding whether or not to award LWSS. In deciding whether to award LWSS, the officer will take into account the following as applicable to the application:

- The exceptional nature of the applicant and their circumstances
- The financial and medical circumstances of the applicant and their household, if they are relevant to the LWSS request
- The income and essential expenditure of the applicant and their household when considering the applicants income. All relevant income will be taken into account. Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and Attendance Allowance will not be included
- Where appropriate applicants will be signposted to other agencies that may be able to provide support and advice
- Any savings and investments held by the applicant and their household, which could be used to help their financial situation
- Whether other family members external to the household help in any way towards the applicants financial expenditure
- Whether the applicant and their household are entitled to other welfare benefits but are not claiming them
- Any steps taken by the applicant to improve their circumstances

- Financial advice they have sought to alleviate their situation, such as from Citizens Advice Bureau or West View Advice and Resource Centre.

The officer will record the reasons why a decision to award or refuse an application has been made.

Non Crisis

The officer will consider the full circumstances before deciding whether or not to award LWSS. In deciding whether to award a LWSS payment, the officer will take into account the following as applicable to the application:

- The applicant meets the criteria set out under 'non crisis' (page 3 of this document)
- The applicant is under the exceptional pressure and/or suffering through unexpected circumstances
- Liaison with key service providers to assist with claim validation
- If the award will help the claimant stay in the community
- If the award will facilitate resettlement into the community.

The officer will record the reasons why a decision to award or refuse an application has been made.

Method of Payment

The Welfare Support team will decide the most appropriate person to pay based upon the circumstances of each case. Depending on individual circumstances, awards may be payable to:

- The applicant
- Their partner
- An appointee
- Any third party to whom it might be most appropriate to make payment i.e. directly to the supplier of goods or services.

The award will usually take the form of a voucher or pre paid card.

Notification

The Welfare Support team will aim to inform the applicant in writing of the outcome of their crisis award application within 24 hours, wherever practicable and within 14 days of receipt of a non crisis application. Where the application is unsuccessful, the team will set out the reasons why this decision was made and explain how to ask for a review. Where the application is successful, the team will advise:

- The amount of LWSS awarded

- How, when and to whom the award will be paid
- How to ask for a request a review.

When Local Welfare Support applications will not be awarded

In crisis awards will **not** be provided for the following:

- A need which occurs outside the United Kingdom
- Any expense which the Council has a statutory duty to meet
- Travelling expenses to or from school
- Expenses in connection with Court (legal) proceedings such as legal fees, Court fees, fines, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses (other than emergency travelling expenses when stranded away from home)
- The cost of domestic assistance and respite care
- Any repair to property owned by public sector housing bodies including housing associations, housing co-operatives and housing trusts
- A medical, surgical, optical, or dental item or service (these needs can be provided free of charge by the National Health Service, if you are getting Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance (income-related) or Pension Credit (which includes the guarantee credit))
- Work related expenses including fares when seeking work and the cost of work clothes because help is available from other sources
- Debts to Government Departments
- Investments
- Purchase, installation, rental and call charges for a telephone
- Mobility needs
- Holidays
- A television, radio, TV licence, aerial or rental charges for a television or radio
- Garaging, parking, purchase and running costs of any motor vehicle except where the payment is being considered for emergency travel expenses
- Council tax
- Water charges
- Applicants who have No Recourse to Public Funds in the United Kingdom as determined by the Home Office
- Where DWP payment is available.

Review

Reviews of any LWSS decision can be requested using the procedure below.

An applicant (or their appointee or agent) who disagrees with a LWSS decision may challenge the decision. A request for a review for non crisis applications should be made in writing to the Council within one calendar month of the written LWSS decision being issued to the applicant. A request for review for in crisis applications should be made in writing within two days of the written decision being issued to the applicant.

When a request is made the Council will conduct a review of the decision and contact the applicant within one month of the review request being received. All reviews will be considered by a Senior Officer not involved in the original decision. The outcome of this review will be notified in writing to the applicant and/or the person submitting the review request.

Monitoring arrangements and managing Local Welfare Support

The Welfare Support team will undertake careful monitoring of the number, amount and period of LWSS awards in relation to the available LWSS budget. The purpose is to ensure the LWSS has sufficient funds to meet demands on the LWSS budget throughout the financial year and to support informed profiling of future year's budgets.

The team will also monitor cases where a LWSS request has been refused to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently. The Council is subject to the general equality duty. This means that steps will be taken to monitor implementation of this policy to ensure no one is subject to disproportionate adverse treatment because they had a protected characteristic. The Council will fully comply with general equality duties.

Publicity

The Welfare Support team will work with partner organisations to raise awareness of the scheme. This includes outreach opportunities within local communities to ensure service users are made aware of the scheme.

Fraud

Hartlepool Borough Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a LWSS award by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006. Where it is alleged or the authority suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, the matter will be investigated and if fraud is found to have occurred, action will be taken including if appropriate criminal proceedings.

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

29th October 2018



Report of: Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Subject: UPDATED DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT FRAMEWORKS

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

Non key

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To advise Members of proposed updates to the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) framework.
- 2.2 To advise Members of additional funding added from the Housing Revenues Account to the DHP fund to support HBC void properties.
- 2.3 To seek approval of the proposed updated framework.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The local authority has received a DHP grant each year since 2004. Since 2012 this grant has increased significantly year on year to support those adversely affected by welfare reforms.
- 3.2 DHPs are made to eligible tenants who are in receipt of Housing Benefit or housing element of Universal Credit. The current approved framework ensures that some tenants can 'automatically' qualify for a DHP – these people fall within a 'protected group' (e.g. the terminally ill, foster carers etc). Others must complete an application form with any awards made subject to an applicant meeting agreed eligibility criteria.
- 3.3 The DHP framework is informed by the 'Discretionary Housing Payment Guidelines' issued by the Department for Work and Pensions each year. Members approved the last framework in 2015/16 and there have been no significant changes since.

- 3.4 The council is allowed to 'top up' its DHP fund if it wishes to do so. However, owing to the impact of continuing cuts in core Government grant and unfunded budget pressures, this could only be achieved by making additional budget cuts to those already required to address the 2019/20 budget deficit of £6 million.

4. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

- 4.1 During 2017/ 18 the government allocated £416,211 to the council and £415,271 was spent. A total of 1,578 awards were made, including those classed as in a 'protected group'.
- 4.2 The table below shows the number of applications and awards made *excluding* protected groups.

	Total number of DHP applications received (excluding those in a 'protected' group)	Total number of DHP applications approved (excluding those in a 'protected' group)	Total number of DHP applications ineligible or declined (excluding those in a 'protected' group)
Q1	239	149	90
Q2	193	100	93
Q3	179	111	68
Q4	316	223	93
Total	927	583	344

- 4.3 The DHP fund for 2018/19 is £455,632. To date demand has proved considerably greater than in previous years and this can be linked directly to the ongoing impact of welfare reform (in particular the under occupation charge or 'bedroom tax' and the benefit cap) and to Universal Credit (claimants struggling to manage monthly payments and inconsistencies in how much they are paid each month).
- 4.4 Up until early October 2018 approximately £70,000 DHP funding remains unallocated. There is no backlog in applications and the team receives a steady intake of approximately 12-15 applications each week. It is impossible to say if the value of the remaining fund is adequate to meet the needs of further DHP applications received. However as the financial year moves on the length of period for awards shortens therefore smaller awards are made.

5. PROPOSED DHP FRAMEWORK 2018/19

- 5.1 **Appendix 1** includes the proposed revised DHP Framework 2018/19. This has been updated to include the following changes:
- That DHP is an important fund/ service that actively supports the council's Child and Family Poverty Strategy (p6)

- The re-affirmation of the need for DHP to be used flexibly to not only support rent shortfalls but to enable applicants secure and sustain suitable tenancies (p5)
- Clarification that DHP can be used for bonds, rent in advance and other lump sum costs including removal fees (p5)
- Acknowledgement of recent case law which determined that DHP can be used for rent arrears where the applicant had an entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing allowance (p5)
- Recognition of new burdens placed upon the council as a result of The Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 and the understanding that the Housing Advice Team who are now part of The Children's Hub can request urgent access to DHP where the applicant meets eligibility criteria and where a same day award will prevent homelessness (p7)
- Care Leavers added into the 'protected group' category enabling Social Workers and Housing Officers to support them to secure and sustain tenancies at the point of leaving care.

6. HBC HOUSING REVENUE FUND

6.1 Overview and Criteria

Regeneration Services Committee on the 18th June 2018 approved the proposal for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to contribute towards DHP payments. This fund is ring-fenced to tenants applying for Council owned houses which are considered difficult to let or long term void. The agreed fund is £35,000 in total and is anticipated to cover approximately 64 properties. The application criteria is based on the property type and the eligibility of tenants will be managed by the Housing Management team. The fund applies to Council owned former empty properties in low demand areas and the property must have been assessed as 'high' or 'medium' risk by the Housing Management Team and have failed to be let following one cycle of advertising on the compass Choice Based Lettings System. The fund is open to any potential tenant who would be able to afford the property but cannot do so due to the under occupation charge. The fund is to cover rent only, no other housing costs will be covered. All potential applicants must have satisfied the Council's letting criteria and provided all relevant references and identification prior to the fund application being made.

- 6.2 Applicants who wish to access HRA funding do so by completing a revised DHP application form. Applicants would be supported to apply by the Housing Management team. Applications would be considered in the usual way at the weekly DHP panel meeting.

7. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The DHP fund is allocated by DWP to the council at the beginning of each year. Regular updates are requested by DWP on our use of the fund throughout the year. The council is able to 'top up' the fund if it wishes to do so, subject to the financial constraints detailed in paragraph 3.4. To date the fund has been adequate and an overspend has not occurred despite an increase in demand. The impact of The Homelessness Reduction Act will be closely monitored to determine if this places pressure on the fund.
- 7.2 DHP applications received over the past 6 – 7 months are showing that Universal Credit (UC) is placing significant burdens on households affected by these changes and also on those council officers that administer the DHP scheme. UC claims need to be checked monthly for any changes; payments are made to the benefit recipient rather than the landlord and evidence of rent arrears due to a failure to pay rent is evident.
- 7.3 The new DHP funding from the HRA is to be incorporated within the existing DHP framework operated by the Council and will be reviewed 6 months after implementation. There is no guarantee that this scheme will continue after this review however, once approved the funds will be paid for the duration of each tenancy agreement (3 years). Therefore the financial commitment of the scheme will continue for a minimum of 3 years. There is an additional risk of adopting the proposal, the Government could change the DHP regulations so that payments have to be discontinued, resulting in tenants not being able to afford their rent. To mitigate this risk, the two year fixed term tenancies will be granted after an initial 12 month introductory period.

8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The DHP fund must be administered according to the framework and relevant financial requirements of the DWP. Failure to do so would risk non-compliance and a penalty from DWP as well as potential legal challenge from an applicant.

9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

- 9.1 DHP forms a significant part of the council's Child and Family Poverty Strategy. The fund offers applicants important welfare assistance to secure and sustain tenancies

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 The Welfare Support team is committed to promoting a community and organisational culture that fully respects and values everyone's differences and needs.

11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations.

12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 Members to agree to the updated Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) framework.
- 13.2 Members to acknowledge Housing Revenues Account funding has been added to the DHP fund to support HBC void properties.

14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 The framework includes relevant updates to ensure the council is compliant with its legal duties.
- 14.2 The framework has been updated to reflect local need.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Discretionary Housing Payments Administration Framework 2018/19.

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Discretionary Housing Payment Administration Framework

2018/19



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Background

The Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme (DHP) was introduced on 2nd July 2001 and granted Local Authorities new powers to pay a discretionary amount to top up Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. The scheme no longer supports Council Tax. Legislation governing DHP is found in the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (SI 001/1167).

The DHP scheme is only available to claimants who are entitled to payment of at least the minimum Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing element allowed.

Funding

The DWP provides local authorities with an annual cash limited fund to enable councils to provide discretionary help. The allocation of discretionary housing payment funding can only be applied to help with Housing Benefit/ Universal Credit housing element awards.

To help manage the impact of the government's housing and welfare reforms the DWP has increased the amount of funding provided year on year but there is no certainty that this will continue.

Restricted Groups

Good practice tells us that some circumstances should give automatic entitlement to a DHP for those whose rent shortfall is caused by Social Sector Size Criteria (under occupation charge/ "bedroom tax"). These include –

- 100% DHP protection for households, where children are on an age threshold which would result in an additional bedroom entitlement within the next 12 months
- 100% DHP protection for claimants who are within 12 months of pension credit qualifying age
- 100% protection for claimants whose property has been significantly adapted via a Disabled Facilities Grant to meet their disability needs
- 100% DHP protection for a pregnant mother claimant who is over 24 weeks pregnant who may shortly have an additional room entitlement up to the expected date of birth of the child
- 100% DHP entitlement for terminally ill claimants

- 100% DHP entitlement for claimants requiring an extra bedroom for a student studying at university providing the student is not in receipt of housing benefit and the bedroom is not sublet during their absence
- 100% DHP entitlement to Care Leavers who are unable to secure a one bedroom tenancy and are therefore subject to an under occupation charge; DHP awards to Care Leavers may include support with the cost of bonds, rent in advance and starting up their own tenancy
- 50% DHP entitlement for claimants requiring an extra bedroom under child access arrangements.

The Benefit Cap

Families affected by the benefit cap will be proactively contacted and offered the opportunity to apply for DHP. Verification of income/expenditure may be required. Such families will be offered support through a 'team around' approach with an appropriate range of individuals and organisations brought together with the family with the aim of making change.

DWP DHP Guidance Manual and Local Procedures

DWP produces a 'Local Authority Good Practice Guide'. This offers advice on how DHPs can be used to support claimants affected by some of the key welfare reforms paying particular attention to those affected by the benefit cap, removal of spare room subsidy in social rented sector (under occupation charge or 'bedroom tax') and reductions in Local Housing Allowance.

The manual does not stipulate how DHP should be administered and leaves Local Authorities to make local decisions on administrative practice. The guidance manual is increasingly promoting the need to use DHP flexibly and is now able to show examples of case law where DHP allocation has been challenged in the courts. This is extremely useful in enabling the Local Authority to keep its decision making up to date and reflective of need.

The Children's Hub has a Welfare Support Team who support service users with a range of services. A DHP procedure is in place which allows all applications for DHP to be channelled through the Hub with award decisions made by the Welfare Support team. This includes any additional support that claimants may require. The actual calculation and processing of their payment is undertaken by the Revenue and Benefits team.

Key Principles of the DHP Guidance Manual – Good Practice Guide

The updated DHP Guidance Manual covers a number of key areas that must be considered in the administration of DHP. These include:

LAs need to follow all relevant financial regulations however remain flexible in their decision making. They need to be fair, reasonable and consistent.

Locally this can mean:

- Support towards housing costs does not only mean rent liability. It can include rent in advance, deposits and other lump sum costs to assist a move such as removal costs
- A DHP can be made on more than one home where an applicant is temporarily absent from their home, perhaps due to a crisis (e.g. fleeing domestic violence)
- Recent case law ('Gargett v Lambeth') has confirmed that DHP can cover rent arrears where the applicant had an underlying entitlement to DHP at the time the arrears accrued
- It is not able to be used to cover service charges, certain sanctions or reductions in benefit
- The length of the award and the frequency of payment are at the local authority's discretion
- A local authority may decide to disregard certain income such as related benefits which are awarded for a very specific reason (e.g. Personal Independence Payments)
- There is no right to appeal however an applicant can ask for a reconsideration.

DHP Administrative Framework

- The administration of the scheme is managed by the Welfare Support team and they are the overall budget holder. The team receives all requests for DHP and makes decisions
- The Revenue and Benefits Service undertakes relevant calculations and arranges payments of subsequent DHP awards
- The scheme is of a discretionary nature; a claimant has no statutory right to payment and no statutory right to appeal
- The total amount an Authority can pay out in any financial year is cash limited by the Secretary of State
- The policy is predicated on the assumption that the Council will not provide any additional funding on top of the DWP annual funding
- Discretionary Housing Payments are not payments of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit Housing element

- An underlying entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing allowance must be in place at the time of application.

Purpose of DHP Administration Framework

The purpose of this policy is to specify how Hartlepool Borough Council's Welfare Support team will operate the DHP scheme and to outline some of the factors to be taken into account when considering awarding a DHP.

The team is committed to working with Hartlepool Borough Council's Revenue and Benefits Team, Housing Advice Team, The Third Sector, Registered Providers, and other interested parties with a view to maximising entitlement to all available state benefits and this will be reflected when administering the DHP scheme.

The scheme will operate in an equitable and fair way. Prior to any award, claimants will be encouraged to take up all other available financial assistance to which they may be entitled and will be signposted to any agencies in the Borough that can assist them to do so.

Statement of Objectives

The Welfare Support team will consider making a DHP to all claimants who meet the qualifying criteria set out in this policy. All applications will be treated on their individual merits and the team will seek, through operation of this policy to:

- Help those adversely affected by the government's Welfare Reform programme
- Reduce homelessness and alleviate poverty
- Help claimants through personal crises and difficult events
- Support vulnerable residents in the local community
- Support vulnerable young residents in the local community in the transition to adult life
- Keep families together
- Safeguard Hartlepool residents in their own homes
- Encourage Hartlepool residents to obtain and sustain employment
- Assist Hartlepool residents to obtain and sustain tenancies
- Help those who are trying to improve their circumstances.

The DHP scheme is a short term emergency fund. It cannot and should not be considered as a means of circumventing current or future entitlement restrictions

set out in Housing Benefit/ Localised Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Universal Credit legislation. DHP should be seen as part of an overall action plan to make changes to a tenants' financial and/or housing situation.

Careful scrutiny and financial management of the DHP fund will ensure that funds are available throughout the year to support DHP claimants where appropriate. Funding will be targeted at vulnerable residents and is available to all those adversely affected by welfare reform.

Homeless Reduction Act 2018

New legislation came into force in April 2018 placing new burdens on the local authority to tackle homelessness. The Housing Advice team are part of The Children's Hub and as such are able to work alongside the Welfare Support team to reduce homelessness and alleviate poverty.

The Housing Advice team will identify vulnerable people that require their support. DHP offers a good opportunity to support some of the most vulnerable tenants and can offer a sense of security as they are supported to sustain their tenancy.

The Housing Advice team will help suitable applicants access DHP and represent their applications at panel. In exceptional circumstances the Principal Housing Officer/ Senior Officer(s) may require an urgent DHP award to be made to prevent homelessness or to secure a tenancy. Such decisions will be made with the support of the Head of Service or other team manager within The Children's Hub. Evidence of application and decision making will be recorded.

Claiming a Discretionary Housing Payment

A claim must be made in writing and signed by the claimant using a current DHP application form. In exceptional circumstances a claim can be made verbally however a written application would then follow. Efforts will be made to release an online application form this financial year.

- Application forms can be collected from the Civic Centre or online at www.hartlepool.gov.uk
- Some community facilities hold copies of the application form (e.g. CAB, WVARC)
- The Welfare Support team may request any reasonable evidence (e.g. receipts/proof of expenditure) in support of a DHP application; receipts will only be requested where expenditure appears higher than average

- Evidence already held in connection with Housing Benefit claims will be taken into account
- The team reserves the right to verify any information or evidence already held
- The team reserves the right to signpost the claimant to support and advice appropriate to the individuals' circumstances and to seek confirmation that engagement has taken place
- The team will ensure that all fully completed DHP forms are prepared and taken to panel for consideration.

Decision Making

DHP panel meets weekly. The meeting is minuted for audit purposes and to ensure all decisions are recorded.

DHP Panel consists of a minimum of three people including two officers and a supervisor/ manager. At least one member of panel will be independent of the Welfare Support team but a member of the wider Children's Hub team. In addition other appropriate professionals may attend including those that have an understating of a particular clients' case.

Final award decisions remain the responsibility of the Welfare Support team.

Requests for reconsiderations are reviewed by a senior manager that was not present at the original decision making meeting. In the majority of cases this will be The Head of Service where appropriate.

Referral and signposting to outside agencies (e.g. debt advice, housing advice) will be made where appropriate, focusing in particular on those cases where a DHP will not resolve serious underlying financial problems. Consent will be gained before such referrals are made.

Period of Award

The Welfare Support team will decide on the length of time for an award, based on the evidence supplied and the facts known. It makes good administrative sense to make some awards for longer periods of time where it is clear that the applicants' situation is unlikely to change. The maximum length of any award can be 12 months and no guarantee can be given that a further award will be made.

The start date of an award will normally be:

- The Monday after the written claim for a DHP is received or

- The date on which entitlement to Housing/Universal Credit housing allowance commenced.

A DHP can only be paid where there is an underlying entitlement to Housing Benefit/Universal Credit housing allowance and cannot be paid at any other time.

- The minimum period of an award will be one week
- For prioritised cases awards may be made for up to 52 weeks
- Awards may be made on a sliding scale to assist with budgeting and to avoid “cliff edge” reduction in income when the DHP ends
- DHPs may be for the whole rent shortfall or part of that amount and it is not unreasonable to ask the applicant to help pay a proportion of their shortfall in rent themselves
- Reasonable requests for a backdated award will be considered but will usually be limited to the current financial year
- Priority may be given to those most adversely affected by Welfare Reform
- Priority may be given to those who actively show engagement with other agencies (e.g. such as Housing Advice Team) who can demonstrate that they are taking reasonable steps to improve their circumstances
- DHPs are not restricted to shortfalls in rent. A DHP award can be made to support an applicant move to more appropriate accommodation that meets their financial circumstances and can include – rent in advance, deposits, removal costs and minor works to a new property to make it tenant ready (e.g. fitting a new carpet/curtains).

Awarding a Discretionary Housing Payment

The decision making process will include consideration of the following:

- All applicants will be subject to an income/expenditure assessment the only exception being those set out under restricted groups
- Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments, Attendance Allowance, War Pensions and Child Maintenance will not be included in the income assessment
- The shortfall between Housing Benefit/Universal Credit housing allowance, the applicants own funds that are available to pay rent and the gross rental liability
- Any steps taken by the claimant to reduce these liabilities e.g. negotiating a reduction in gross rent, attempts to reduce household expenditure
- Impact of Welfare Reform

- Compliance with reasonable requests to engage with others to improve circumstances e.g. housing, work activity providers, debt advice
- The financial circumstances of the claimant and all members of the claimant's household
- The medical circumstances of the claimant and all members of the claimant's household
- Any savings or capital available to the claimant and all the members of the claimant's household
- The level of debt owed by the claimant and all of the claimant's household
- Any exceptional circumstance of the claimant and all of the claimant's household
- The amount available in the Discretionary Housing Payment fund at the time of the application
- The possible impact of not making an award
- Any other special circumstances brought to the attention of the Welfare Support team.

Changes in Circumstances

An award may be revised or withdrawn where the claimant's circumstances have materially changed.

Method of Payment

The team will decide who to pay on a case by case basis. This may include:

- The claimant
- The claimant's partner
- An appointee
- The landlord or agent of the landlord
- Any third part where it is appropriate to do so.

The method of payment may include:

- By BACS or cheque
- By crediting the Rent Account.

The payment frequency may fall in line with the Housing Benefit /Universal Credit payments.

In the case of Universal Credit applicants, their DHP will be paid wherever possible to the landlord.

Notification

Once a decision is made, the claimant will be notified in writing. This will be undertaken by the Revenue and Benefits Service who will aim to do so within 14 days of panel.

Where the application is unsuccessful, the notification will include:

- The reason for the decision
- The right to ask for a review, although there is no actual right of appeal.

Where the application is successful, the notification will include:

- The weekly amount of the award
- The period of the award
- Whether it will be paid in arrears or in advance
- The payment method, date of payment and the payee
- The need to report a change in circumstance.

The Right of Review

DHPs are not payments of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit housing element and are not subject to any statutory appeals mechanism. Councils are expected to set up an appropriate review process.

Any request for a review will be subject to the following policy:

- The claimant (or the claimant's appointee/agent) who disagrees with a decision about a DHP may dispute the decision
- Disputes must be requested in writing and will be considered where they are received by the team within one calendar month of the written decision being issued to the claimant
- Disputes will be considered by the Head of Service assuming they were not involved in the first decision
- The outcome will be notified in writing.

Service Standards

The team will endeavour to process applications for DHP within four weeks of the applicant providing full information.

What a DHP cannot cover

The aim is to make DHP as flexible and accessible as possible, however there are certain things that cannot be included for the purposes of a DHP because the law excludes them. These are as follows:

- Ineligible service charges
- Increases in rent due to outstanding arrears
- Certain benefit sanctions
- The fund cannot be used in respect of Council Tax Support (the local scheme which replaced Council Tax Benefit)
- Overpayments of Housing Benefit.

Overpayments

Where an applicant purposely set out to deceive the local authority the Revenue and Benefits Service will seek to recover any DHP found to be overpaid.

The method of recovery will generally be by invoice but reduction in weekly Housing Benefit may be considered. Generally any overpayments caused by official error will be treated as not recoverable. Overpayments will be notified in writing and have a right of review.

Publicity

The Welfare Support team will publicise the DHP Scheme and will work with all interested parties to achieve this. Information relating to the amount spent will be made available at the end of each financial year. Outreach activity is encouraged to enable DHP reach more people.

Fraud

The Welfare Support team and the Revenue and Benefits Service are committed to prevention and detection of fraud. Where false statements or false evidence is used to obtain payment by way of the DHP Scheme then an offence may have been committed. Where fraud is suspected, the matter will be investigated appropriately and this may lead to criminal proceedings being

instigated. The Local Authority has a duty to protect public funds, and so may use information given to prevent and detect fraud and may give some information to other organisations where the law allows.

