

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

18 JUNE 2019

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

Present:

Councillor Shane Moore (In the Chair)

Councillors: James Brewer, Paddy Brown, Dave Hunter, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little, Ann Marshall, Leisa Smith, John Tennant, and Mike Young.

Officers: Gill Alexander, Chief Executive
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor
Chris Little, Director of Finance and Policy
John Morton, Assistant Director, Finance and Customer Services
Denise McGuckin, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Julian Heward, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2019

Received.

4. Urgent Works to Christ Church (*Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Key Decision, test (i). A General Exception Notice applies.

Purpose of report

To seek Finance and Policy's Committee approval to the proposed reallocation of the Council's property-related budget to cover the

unexpected and urgent works required to Christ Church, and to refer this proposal to Council for approval.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that in November 2018 a piece masonry fell from Christ Church as a result of weathering and poor stone quality, which led to the area being fenced off for the safety of passing pedestrians.

A survey had been subsequently commissioned to assess the structural condition of Christ Church, using a qualified Stonemason, to help the Council understand the nature of the works required and estimated costs for these. The survey identified that urgent works were required to protect Christ Church from further erosion and remove the risk of further potential incidents and thereby protect the public.

There was currently no funding identified to cover the costs of these works as they were very much unexpected, which meant it had not been included in any allocation of funding from the Council's property budgets.

The estimated costs of the works were £245,000 and it was proposed to fund these by re-allocating the £190,000 of capital funding currently allocated to the Bowls Club, with the remaining £55,000 being funded from the corporate planned maintenance programme. The Director highlighted that approval of Council would be required to re-allocate the £190,000 of capital funding

The issues in relation to Christ Church has highlighted an issue in relation to how the Council responds to such incidents. It was proposed, therefore, to bring a further report to Committee to review how the capital maintenance allocation would be managed in the future.

The Committee discussed the issues around the funding of the works and the necessity for the works. The Director assured Members and a member of the public that an assessment of the works required had been undertaken by an appropriately specialised surveyor and while no guarantees could be given as to the exact final costs, officers would look to ensure that costs were kept within the financial proposals reported.

Decision

1. That Council approval be sought to reallocate the capital funding of £190,000 for the Bowls Club previously allocated to this building to help fund the urgent works required to Christ Church;
2. That Council be requested to note that recent surveys had identified that the proposed works to the Bowls Club were not urgent, and they can be considered, therefore, as part of a future funding allocation. In the unlikely event that the condition of the Bowls Club building

deteriorated any necessary work would need to be prioritised from within the available corporate planned maintenance budget.

3. The Committee noted that £55,000 would also be allocated to the Christ Church Scheme from the corporate planned maintenance programme.
4. That approval be given an overall budget of £245,000 associated with carrying out the urgent repairs to Christ Church.

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

Type of decision

Non Key Decision.

Purpose of report

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

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Finance and Customer Services reported on the actions undertaken by the authority in the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and the levels of collection within the year and over five years. Details of the debts proposed to be written out of the accounts were set out in schedules appended to the report. Appendices A, B, C, D, E and F to the report contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely (para3), information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The total amount for write out were as follows:

Council Tax £78,338.43

Appendix A – C Tax Deceased Debts- £15,648.94

Appendix B – C Tax Absconder Debts - £20,876.30

Appendix C – C Tax Bankrupt / Debt Relief Order Debts / Liquidation - £29,723.04

Appendix D – C Tax Miscellaneous- £12,090.15

Business Rates £337,419.14

Appendix E – Business Rates Sole Trader Bankrupt - £4,609.66

Appendix F – Business Rates Sole Trader Absconder / Miscellaneous - £64,908.50

Appendix G – Business Rates Limited Company Liquidation / Dissolved -
£267,900.98

Members congratulated the Finance Team on the levels of collection reported and reluctantly approved the write outs reported.

Decision

1. The Committee noted the effective recovery arrangements for Council Tax and Business Rates and the performance levels reported.
2. That approval be given to write-out irrecoverable Council Tax of £78,338.43 and Business Rates debts to the value of £337,419.14 noting that £190,197.60 (56%) of this Business Rates write out was the responsibility of Central Government.

6. Risk Management Framework (*Assistant Director, Corporate Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to seek Finance and Policy Committee's agreement of a new Risk Management Framework for the Council.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Finance and Policy submitted the new proposed Risk Management Framework for Members' approval. The Framework built upon the previous one and reflected best practice. It had simplified the Council's approach, provided further clarity to officers about how risk should be considered within the Council and demonstrated the added value of appropriate risk management. Throughout the development of the proposed Framework the Head of Internal Audit has been involved providing feedback in order to ensure that the new Framework provides the required level of assurance and responds effectively to the concerns raised through the internal audit report.

The new proposed Risk Management Framework was considered by Audit and Governance Committee at their meeting on 6th June 2019. They confirmed that they were satisfied that it provided adequate assurance and agreed for it to go forward to this committee for approval.

In addition to the new Framework an officer toolkit had been developed to provide a handy guide for officers leading them step by step through the risk process and aims to ensure consistency in the process. A review of the Council's risk register will be undertaken and training and support would be

provided to officers across the organisation to ensure that risks were recorded and reported appropriately.

A new Strategic Risk Register was being prepared and regular updates would be brought to Finance and Policy within the six-monthly Council Plan Performance reports.

Decision

That the new Risk Management Framework, set out as Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

7. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 22 July 2019 commencing at 10.00 am in the Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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